

NEW ADVENTURES

MICHAEL MONAHAN

NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY



3 0109 00085 4847

PS
3525
025
N5
1917

DATE DUE

Subject To Recall After 2 Weeks

**LIBRARY
NORTH DAKOTA
STATE UNIVERSITY
FARGO, NORTH DAKOTA**

WITHDRAWN

NOV 21 1927

NEW ADVENTURES

MICHAEL MONAHAN

NEW ADVENTURES

BY

MICHAEL MONAHAN

AUTHOR OF "PALMS OF PAPYRUS,"
"NOVA HIBERNIA," "AT THE SIGN OF THE VAN," ETC.



NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

43157

N. D. S. U. LIBRARY
FARGO, N. D.

814
M74

U.S. NATIONAL ARCHIVES
FARGO, N.D.

Copyright, 1917, by
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

PS
3525
025
N5
1917

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

U.S. NATIONAL ARCHIVES
FARGO, N.D.

TO
JOHN QUINN
A GESTURE OF FRIENDSHIP AND ADMIRATION

43157

Tous les livres en général et même les plus admirables me paraissent infiniment moins précieux par ce qu'ils contiennent que par ce qu'y met celui qui les lit. Les meilleurs, à mon sens, sont ceux qui donnent le plus à penser, et les choses les plus diverses.

ANATOLE FRANCE.

CONTENTS

MANNAHATTA

	PAGE
THE CALL OF THE CITY.....	15
A HOLIDAY IN GOTHAM.....	19
TRIAL BY NEWSPAPER.....	25
OUR "BRAND OF CAIN".....	29
THE SHAKESPEARE TERCENTENARY:	
An Elizabethan Performance.....	37
Sir Herbert Tree's "Shylock".....	42
A Shakespearian Exhibit.....	51

MANNAHATTA II

SPAGHETTI	57
NEWYORKITIS	61
OLD MEN FOR LOVE.....	64
THE CRAZE FOR BEAUTY	69
CHANGES IN BABYLON.....	74
THE GREAT WHITE WAY.....	78
THE MORGAN LIBRARY.....	83
IN NUBIBUS.....	91

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

		PAGE
ONE	BALZAC THE LOVER.....	99
TWO	BALZAC THE ARTIST.....	122
THREE	THE FORTUNATE HOAX OF PAGAN WAS- TENEYS	145
FOUR	THE MAID AGAIN.....	160
FIVE	OUR BEST-LOVED POET....	169
SIX	ALMA LUPA	187
SEVEN	A NOTE ON LAFCADIO HEARN.....	193
EIGHT	THE KISS	199
NINE	THE "FREE" POETS.....	206

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

ONE	BERMUDA	219
TWO	BERMUDA II	231
THREE	THE CONQUEROR	247
FOUR	TWO PICTURES.....	257
FIVE	THE COLLECTOR	264
SIX	THE PENMAN	274
SEVEN	CHANTICLEER	280
EIGHT	THE CIRCUS	288
NINE	NOCTURNE	299
TEN	YEARNINGS	310

CONTENTS

xi

PAGE

ELEVEN	PLATONICS	322
TWELVE	FALSE YOUTH	328
THIRTEEN	GHOSTS	335
FOURTEEN	THE AGE OF SAFETY.....	342
FIFTEEN	REST	347

LAGNIAPPE

ONE	PHILOSOPHY IN LITTLE:	
	The Literary Motive.....	355
	Truths and Truisms.....	361
	The Woman	366
TWO	THE GRAIN OF WHEAT.....	370

MANNAHATTA

MANNAHATTA'

THE CALL OF THE CITY

*I was asking for something specific and perfect for my city,
Whereupon, lo! upsprang the aboriginal name!*

—WALT WHITMAN.

HE THAT has once felt the spell of Manna-hatta will, if the fates permit, return to her again and still again. In other and lesser cities, on the waste of ocean, in rural solitudes or desert places, the call of the mighty Mother will reach him, and perforce he will gird up his loins and obey.

This may be put forth as a more or less poetical statement of a fact both simple and psychological. He that has drunk will drink, says the French proverb; and he that has known Mannahatta—literally *drunk* her, for she is herself a mighty intoxication,—will always go back athirst for the cordials she alone can supply.

And so it was that, along about the middle of the past May, I began to feel in my blood a summons which I have come to know quite well—the

MANNAHATTA

call of Mannahatta. I was not sorry, for the Connecticut winter, then barely ended, had been the longest and coldest in my memory. The mere effort to keep physically alive had impoverished the spiritual man. Also I had grown weary of the Connecticut face, not over-attractive in either man or woman in these parts; and there were alarming symptoms that I was taking on the Connecticut mind. It was May, as I have said, and we were still wearing overcoats and sleeping under heavy blankets. The newspapers were recalling a certain Connecticut year when the summer had been lost from the calendar (this no doubt a just visitation upon the pleasure-hating puritans). My thoughts would not flow; my ink-pot derided me; I tasted the cruel despair of the man who begins to fail in his natural vocation. Something had to be done, and quickly too! I will arise, I said, and go to my mother Mannahatta, for she alone can heal me.

Thereupon I fled with a single grip, delighted as a man should be who runs away from a hard job to snatch a precarious holiday. Nor did I pause until I had snugly ensconced myself in the very heart of Mannahatta. . . .

THE CALL OF THE CITY

Balzac somewhere shrewdly observes the persistence of the vital spark in the sick in the crowded quarters of a great city where the strong current of human life rises to the full. It is a good thought and a cheering one. Life begets life and the desire of living; human companionship is almost the condition of existence. The hermits who have lived long in their solitude are memorable instances—because there have been so few hermits. Secular age and health pass without comment in the immense human hives where they are too familiar to challenge remark. The common notion that people live longer in the country than in the city, is wrong, like so many other received ideas: the truth is, they die earlier and faster in the country, and the earlier and the faster in direct ratio to the lack of companionship. Solitude is the best known aid to the madhouse and the cemetery—even the solitude of open fields and healthful skies. On the other hand, there are in the densely populated ghettos of Vienna, of London and of New York, surrounded by conditions that would seem to make health impossible, persons so old that time appears to have passed them by.

MANNAHATTA

Do you want to live and live long?—then be where men and women are living, loving and propagating life. Borrow from the universal vital force. Draw on the common fund of health and energy. Drink from the full-flowing stream of life. Deep calls unto deep and heart unto heart! With a million hearts beating around you, with a million pulses challenging and inciting your own, how can you fail to keep time to the great rhythmic harmony? From all these you derive strength and hope and encouragement; every throb of every one of them all is a summons to live—to live—to live!

Now of this hear a proof. It seemed to me, as in an evil dream, that I had long been sad and dejected, brooding over unhappiness and poisoning my blood with the black viper-doubts that strike into the very heart of life; believing my heritage of length of days to be forfeited; shunning the cheerful society of my fellows; keeping alone with a swarm of morbid fears and fancies; looking on life with the lost gaze of one who divines everywhere an unseen but exultant and implacable enemy.

Then, at last, I yielded to the bidding of a
[18]

A HOLIDAY IN GOTHAM

kinder spirit. I threw off the nightmare and mingled again with my kind. I went where men and women were merry with feast and dance, with wine and music and song. I looked for the joy of the human face and did not look in vain. I recovered in a moment my old birthright of hope and happiness. My heart, so long drooping, rose at the compelling summons of life about me: the old desire to live and love sprung up anew in me to hail the red flag in a woman's cheek and the bright challenge of her eyes. I filled my glass and at the bidding of Beauty and Joy devoted my ancient sick fears to perdition. I was merry with the rest, aye, merry with the maddest; and since that hour . . . I live . . . I live . . . I live!

A HOLIDAY IN GOTHAM

THE PRESENT scribe has known New York, "on and off," more or less intimately during twenty-five years, but his very first introduction occurred when he was a little boy of six years—a good bit farther back. So he has fully experienced the lure of the Great City mentioned above, and this the more that in his youth he was

MANNAHATTA

a shade too curious perhaps about lures of every species.

I may then claim, as the phrase goes, to know my New York. I have been away from it years at a time. I have also lived years within its gates; I have "commuted" to it from Jersey and points above the Harlem river. The great changes which the City has undergone in the past quarter-century are quite familiar to me. I knew it before the great Russian-Jewish immigration, when it was almost an American city, instead of as now, in many sections, a predominantly foreign one. I knew Fifth Avenue before it was invaded by trade, when its proud pavements were unpressed by the present hordes of Yiddish-speaking toilers—those wonderful people, creators of new wealth and new problems, who will have much to say in the future destiny of New York. I witnessed the rise of the sky-scrapers, from the "World's" gilded dome to the loftier turret of the Woolworth Building, which give New York a certain grandiose distinction among the great cities of the world. I saw the first shovelful taken for the first Subway, and I waited for the opening of the Hudson Tunnel, which seems to have been

A HOLIDAY IN GOTHAM

but the other day, while—such is the tremendous march of the city's life—it is already spoken of as a thing of ancient date. I saw the City fling out long arms in order to bring to herself the cities and towns that make her boroughs of Brooklyn and Queen's and the Bronx. Nay, in the span of years mentioned I have seen her become the first City in the world!

But hear now a truth. If one's lot is cast among so many and so great marvels; if he is, moreover, obliged to hug his own personal problems in the midst of them, then is he apt to lose the due sense of wonder. That was something my own case when I dwelt within the gates of Gotham. Hence my keen desire to see her as a visitor in holiday mood.

And I was not disappointed. There is an electric, exhilarating something in the air,—an invitation to be happy, as it were,—which no other American city offers, and which Paris alone possesses in greater degree—that is, in perfection. There is illusion about this, of course, for New York behind her gay, smiling welcome is cruel, more cruel than Paris, and also not less calculating as regards the prices she exacts from the seekers of

MANNAHATTA

pleasure. But this is not a thought with which to plague your holiday with our Lady of Manhattan.

Yes, you can be as happy as you please in New York, dear reader, especially if you have the wherewithal that pays the dues of happiness; money indeed is very necessary, and New York looks askance at him who has it not. But even this is but a partial truth, for as Richard of the Quest has wisely said, our Paradises are often cheap—it is our Hells that cost us so dear. New York spreads a feast for the eye and ear of him who hath but little money in his scrip, and I felt this as never before when on the afternoon of my arrival (to make the most of my scant liberty) I rolled up Fifth Avenue, gallantly perched on the hurricane deck of a Green Bus. This is one of the cheapest and best pleasures that the City has to offer; he need not lack it who may command the tenth part of a Broad Piece. You deposit your dime in a box which the guard or conductor presents to you; he is *not allowed to put in the fare himself*. Such a precaution, you think, might humiliate an honest man, and the farther you go the more you are convinced that common honesty is not much regarded, nor taken for granted, in

A HOLIDAY IN GOTHAM

New York. Tipping is for once out of the question, and the decent visitor may voyage heart-free along the richest thoroughfare in the world.

The day was one of splendid sunshine, and the avenue presented the most brilliant and animated spectacle that one could wish for, the roadway being fairly a-swarm with the automobiles of the rich, while the sidewalks were thronged with promenaders, especially women in bright spring toilets (we are now in the favoured region above Forty-second street). Majestic at the crossways stand the giants of the New York police, giving rule and order to the confluent and opposing tides of the avenue. No trivial duty theirs; one has but to think of what consequences would attend a single minute of anarchy in the government of these two great processions. No class of men have been more savagely and wantonly abused than the New York police, and it well may be that there is a dark side to the shield. But I am not the less sure that they have never had due credit for their sterling virtues and the uncommon heroism which they so often exhibit in serving law and order and human life. In all my experience of New York, I

MANNAHATTA

have never seen a policeman misconduct himself, and I have never been rudely treated by one. This will seem astonishing to people who get their impressions of the New York police from a certain kind of lurid fiction, or from newspapers with a political axe to grind. In point of fact, nothing is ever so bad in New York as the newspapers make it out to be, which newspapers derive a profit from defaming the city to the country-at-large. Most of the crazy notions relative to New York, which are especially cherished by strangers and foreigners, are due to a lot of hack writers, scribblers of patent inside stuff for country weeklies, who lack ability to present a correct picture even of a New York policeman. Certainly no great city has ever suffered so much from libellers within its own gates.

So thinking, I leaned over the rail of our green chariot and gratefully saluted a crossing guardian. Again luck was with me, for he courteously returned the salute (something almost unheard of in the newspaper legend). Then we turned west and fared gaily on toward Riverside Drive and the castled heights of those envied apartment folk who pay rentals of from ten to twenty-five

TRIAL BY NEWSPAPER

thousand a year. A domain of imposing fronts, gorgeous courts and porter-guarded inaccessibility; in fact, Apartmentaria seems to offer everything that wealth could desire. And surely wealth in New York was never more conscious of itself than it is to-day. Happily there was no "barker" on our coach to blare out, in an East Side accent, the wigwams of the many-dollared; I will here observe a like reticence.

TRIAL BY NEWSPAPER

AS EVERYBODY knows, New York is—the Woman! It is the most feminized of all our cities; the one in which American woman-worship is carried to the wildest extreme; the one in which scarcely anything is done without reference to the Eternal Feminine. Almost comic is the universal preoccupation with sex, as reflected in the newspapers, the magazines, the theatres, the café life, everywhere. And (though I am the first to announce it) the true symbol of New York is the Powder Puff. This in spite of the fact that she has so far refused the ballot to women.

But there is a difference to note: New York

MANNAHATTA

loves women for their beauty and the pleasure they can give, not for their intellectual qualities. The first typical New York woman you see on Fifth Avenue tells the story:—her dress, her manner, her *allure*, the very atmosphere she creates about herself, all declare the human orchid of intense sex-cultivation. The New York woman is notoriously the most sex-conscious in America, and she cares nothing for the ballot. She wants to rule men in the way of the ancient sovereignty of her sex, and she is anathema to the man-hating suffragette.

When you see a perfect specimen of this type, you will readily admit that she is worth all the trouble she occasionally makes and all the money that men lavish upon her. She is *the* woman whom one is tempted to personify as New York.

This woman, proud, beautiful, sex-conscious, miraculously expensive, is the spoiled darling of Gotham, but, of course, there is not a majority of her kind. Even in Manhattan one sees many a woman who could not be anybody's darling, and such women, it is unkindly said, are the chief hope of the suffrage cause.

New York is so thoroughly feminized in the way
[26]

TRIAL BY NEWSPAPER

I have suggested, that it is next to impossible to convict a woman of a capital crime. The singular process known as Trial by Newspaper, here carried to a point of perfection, can almost always be relied upon to get the woman off.

While I was in the City a woman was acquitted of the charge of murdering her two infant children, the fruit of an illicit passion. The fact that she gave them poison which caused their death was not disputed. On her behalf, there was medical testimony of the usual wabbling, inconclusive sort, to prove that she was deranged when the crime was committed. In further mitigation, it was pleaded that she took the poison herself in a sufficient quantity to kill; but in spite of obvious juggling and collusion on the part of certain witnesses, this was not established. Nevertheless, the woman went free, amid a great trumpeting of the newspapers and with every sign of the public approval. Nay, even the District Attorney who had prosecuted her, though fully convinced of her guilt, hastened to offer his congratulations. Feminism had secured the acquittal of this woman, who in England or in Canada would have been sum-

MANNAHATTA

marily convicted and, if not hanged, sent to prison for life.

The singular issue of this case vindicates the importance of Trial by Newspaper. During many months before this woman was brought to the bar, her case was constantly agitated, featured and discussed in the newspapers. It was precisely the kind of stuff they love to handle, with love, seduction, crime, and all manner of sexual suggestiveness, as the chief ingredients, and an erring woman as the heroine. All the emotional female journalists—the Sob Squad as they are called—were put to work on the story. Their fictive tears drooled incessantly through the evening and morning editions; the vast army of people who read only the newspapers, and read these until they can see only yellow, were thoroughly saturated. What jury picked from such a public could do otherwise than this jury did? The District Attorney never had a chance, and as he felt lonely and neglected during the public congratulations on his failure to convict, I don't blame him for his words of sympathy. A verdict is a verdict, and even District Attorneys cannot afford to be indifferent to Trial by Newspaper.

OUR "BRAND OF CAIN"

Singularly enough, about the time this woman was acquitted of murdering her children and was sent forth to freedom with gracious and honouring words from the press, another woman, widely known for her ability and courage, was sent to prison for the crime of advocating birth-control. Such is thy consistency, O Manhattan!

OUR "BRAND OF CAIN"

CRIMINAL LAW, as exhibited in the New York courts, seems mostly a noisy, foolish, futile farce, with wrangling, jawing lawyers who have taken their wit from the vaudeville, their manners from the Tenderloin, and whose learning or courtesy is never ostentatiously in evidence. These strenuous persons play "rough-house" with each other and, as far as they dare, with the court, for the amusement of the spectators and the profit of the newspapers, which report the salient vulgarities of their wordy warfare.

The object of the able counsel on each side is by any and all hazards to keep out of evidence the least hint of truth that would injure their case.

Every one, not a fool, present in the court, is

MANNAHATTA

fully aware that the Truth is near and cries out for a hearing. But the lawyers nearly always muzzle it in time, or if it break away from them and run shrieking to the learned judge, he is sure to apply the garrotte. No doubt this is all strictly according to the rules of procedure, but to a plain mind, unversed in the tortuous ways of the law, the whole thing looks like an organized conspiracy to keep the facts out of court and make a mock of justice.

Naturally, Justice fares ill in her encounter with these active, resourceful lawyers who have no use for her presence—she is punched, mauled, cross-countered, upper-cut, dragged by the hair and subjected to all manner of abuse, while the learned judge gropes among his authorities.

It is not wonderful that Justice should be defeated in such a place and under such conditions—the wonder is that she ever gets a show for her life, as she does now and then, when nobody is looking on or particularly interested. . . .

In England it seldom takes longer than a week to try a murderer. In New York it takes all the way from one to three years, according to the
[30]

OUR "BRAND OF CAIN"

means of the accused and the ability of the lawyers. Murderers without friends or money are shuffled off with less ceremony, but even in such cases there is often delay unknown to the English courts.

Murder trials in England are conducted with stern impressiveness. There is no sensationalism, in the American style. The accused, whatever his or her station, is treated with the impartial rigour meted out to all under the hand of the law. He or she can not have other meals than the prison fare. He or she is not allowed to receive flowers either from friends or the morbidly inclined. The hundred and one circumstances which in this country serve to heroize the shedder of blood and for the time being to solicit the fearful admiration of a large section of the public, are totally wanting in the conduct of an English trial. Most important of all, the newspapers do not "spread" upon it, elaborating every morbid detail, working the prurient or sexual interest to the farthest limit, making a cult of homicide to serve their own sensational ends. That is the method of our Yellow Press which, as has been alleged of the New York police at their worst, creates more crime than

MANNAHATTA

it detects or reports. By comparison, the English newspapers are deadly dull in their treatment of murder trials—no “scare headings” six inches deep in lurid type, no pictures, snap-shots from every possible angle; no stories in the advanced journalistic style, one part fact to three parts fake; no dramatization of dirt—nothing of all that indecent exhibit which debauches the public of New York and helps to make a travesty of justice.

Is this generally the reason that human life is far safer from crimes of violence in London than in New York?—that fewer murders are committed in all England during a year than in the city of Chicago in the same space of time?—waiving entirely the blood-drenched statistics of the Southwest, with the auto-da-fés of the lynching belt?

Not long ago the English press were printing homilies on the “brand of Cain in the great Republic.” Can we deny the brand? and how comes the smirch, if not by the corruption and degradation of the law?

I am not an upholder of capital punishment. I believe that the state should not take human life; that neither the state nor the individual has

[32]

OUR "BRAND OF CAIN"

the right to slay. But the first duty of the state is to preserve its members. England does this better than our own country, and she has far less blood on her hands. If she were to abolish the death penalty to-morrow, her hands would be cleansed of blood, and life under her laws would be as fully secured as now, since these laws would be carried out to the letter.

The fact that in this free country no law carries a guaranty of enforcement, withholds many people from demanding the abolition of the death penalty. As things are and as they will long be, it would be a harder job to shut up a murderer for life than to send him to the gallows or the electric chair. One of our own judges has said that "the American people do not greatly object to the shedding of blood—except by process of law!"

England goes on grimly killing her murderers, but she *does* kill them, and that keeps the crop within bounds. In this country we coddle and foster them by every possible means—chiefly by defeating or corrupting the law. Hence the crop is so large that in some centres of American culture, murderers crowd honest men into the gutter—and no apology asked or given!

MANNAHATTA

Perhaps when we get tired of making over-much money and planting our kind of civilization in the benighted Orient, we may give a little serious attention to this matter.

Meantime, Liberty—God bless her!—would be fairer without that red smirch on her throat, and Justice would appear more seemly on her august tribunal but for her trick of stooping to the vaudeville lawyers and sometimes even courting the evil favour of the Yellow Press.

WHEN DICKENS first visited this country, something over sixty years ago, the feud spirit was at its height in the South, the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons were busily potting or carving one another all over that section, and the duello was being invoked for the settlement of even minor points of honour. Of all this blood-letting the great novelist recorded his impressions in the “American Notes,” subsequently published, which raised a howl of rage against him from the press of this country, especially in the centres of “chivalry.”

A score of years later Dickens came over again and made a highly profitable lecture tour of the

OUR "BRAND OF CAIN"

States. Whether it was owing to the warmth of his reception or that he found an abatement of our pleasant homicidal ways, it is certain that he made a handsome and almost candid apology for "Chuzzlewit" and the "Notes." The latter, it may be remarked, is still the better reading of the two.

A generation has passed since Dickens's last visit and, though we have mended our manners considerably in the South and elsewhere, it must be admitted that, as somebody in "Huckleberry Finn" says, there is still a "right smart chance of funerals" among us. The feuds have all declined, largely owing to the interested parties being mostly killed off; but as a compensation, there are far more lynchings than in Dickens's day. Also the "unwritten law" tragedy is much more common both South and North. Indeed, with the approval of a large section of the press, this is now become the National Specialty.

Dickens had some very cutting things to say about the New York press of ante-Civil War days, but what would his satirical genius have done with the recently evolved and perfected Trial by Newspaper? What would he have thought of a great

MANNAHATTA

public melted to maudlin compassion by the arts of a prostitute, aided and abetted by a shameless press? A journalist of the highest mark himself, how would he have regarded the degradation of journalism by a set of professional male and female panders, expert sensationalists, artists in pruriency, corrupters of youth and age? How would he have treated the brazen assurance of the quacks calling themselves alienists, who for enormous fees are ready to give any sort of testimony needed in order to bring off a murderer? What sort of rebuke would he have addressed to the harpy lawyers defending and fleecing their client—to the stupid or complaisant judges suffering the farce to drag endlessly on—to the shame and horror and disgrace of it all?

Do you doubt that were Dickens living to-day he would write something on all this, which would instantly make waste-paper of “Chuzzlewit” and the “Notes”?

SHAKESPEARE TERCENTENARY,

THE SHAKESPEARE TERCENTENARY

An Elizabethan Performance

DURING MY visit to town the Shakespeare Tercentenary was in full swing, but it seemed to me that the celebration was a painfully worked-up affair, lacking heart and spontaneous feeling. Writers who knew nothing about Shakespeare—according to Frank Harris, an excellent authority—were rushing into print with more or less valuable contributions. Actors, not specially identified with the Shakespearian drama, were giving interviews in which they protested their passionate attachment to the Bard and their regret for the indifference of the public who have turned their back on the classic tradition. Modest persons, incapable of self-advertisement, were declaring that Shakespeare was their only reading, and ladies of “Society” were graciously appearing in masques and tableaux designed to honour the immortal Man of Avon. There was almost the same apparent furore of enthusiasm which (according to “Mr. Dooley”) once moved the New York

MANNAHATTA

public to wish to put a fur coat on the Goddess of Liberty in the bay and call her Kipling. Had it been proposed to metamorphose the Statue into a likeness to the Chandos or Droeshout portrait, the public would, I am sure, have been absolutely delighted. But even at that it wouldn't have proved much for New York's love and understanding of Shakespeare.

I went to the Century Theatre to see the "Tempest," for which production was chiefly responsible Mr. John Corbin (who insisted upon spelling the Bard's name as *Shakspeare*). It was notable for an attempt to reproduce the stage and dramatic accessories of Shakespeare's time, and the full text of the play was used without, so far as I could judge, any material omission or expurgation. The experiment was interesting and even praiseworthy, but I doubt if it would "go" under less favouring circumstances or without a special audience. In spite of the painstaking character of the production and the average excellence of the cast, there were leaden interludes which even the frequent flashes of golden poetry did not serve to relieve. *Prospero*, wonderful as he is in the library, was at times dreadfully prolix and boring,

[38]

SHAKESPEARE TERCENTENARY

while no small part of his magic business seemed laughably puerile. This may have been the fault of the actor, who certainly failed to realize the mystical rôle of *Prospero*, and whose manner of reading the lines stripped them of all poetry; but I doubt if any mime, however gifted, could have made the part entirely acceptable. Time's rasure has told strongly against the "Tempest" as an acting play, though it will always be read with pleasure for the poetry which only Shakespeare could have written. The "rightful Duke of Milan" cannot, I think, be otherwise than wrongfully put on the boards, and with a complaisance from the auditors which may rarely be counted upon. Then it is never to be forgotten that the language of Shakespeare is not our language—more's the pity; and so it does not "carry" in the theatre, where quick apprehension is the chief desideratum. It was palpable at this performance that a great many of the lines were lost upon the audience. Even *Prospero's* wonderful speech beginning—

*Our revels now are ended, these our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits,—*

MANNAHATTA

passed, as the actors say, "without a hand." Also the strained look on many faces betokened imperfect understanding; and I felt that the Cohan drama was nowise threatened in its popularity.

Again, it was demonstrated that the present-day public cannot abide Shakespeare (same man as Mr. Corbin's friend *Shakspere*) without expurgation. Honest William's manner of calling a spade a spade, without euphemism, will not go down with us. It is not that we are more moral, perhaps, than the Elizabethans; but, of a truth, we are more fastidious, and we shudder at words with the muck of nature attached to them. In this play the bawdy oaths of the seamen and the coarse fooleries of *Stephano* and *Trinculo* were very palpably a severe trial to the audience, and even the splendid work of Walter Hampden fell short of making *Caliban* a fit person to introduce to the Young Girl. Rather did this crude piece of nature, half faun, half beast, keep the audience in a constant moral trepidation. Indeed, when the unlovely son of *Sycorax* voiced his regret at having failed to ravish *Miranda*, and deplored his lost hope of peopling the isle with *Calibans*, there

[40]

SHAKESPEARE TERCENTENARY

was a tensivity of mute protest among the audience which it was quite impossible to mistake.

And mind you, the audience as a whole was such an one as could not readily be assembled for a Shakespearian play; cultured, appreciative and disposed to condone the Bard's occasional grossness for the sake of his magical poetry.

And yet, when all is said, I am not sure but that *Ariel* (exquisitely realized by Fania Marinoff) carried away all faults of the production. Certainly she at times persuaded us of the true wizardry of *Prospero*, especially when that long-tongued old person was absent from the scene. Delicate *Ariel!* thou wert the very thought of Shakespeare, his most darling creation, his familiar spirit. As we listened to thy prattling lyric speech, so strangely mingled of earth and faeryland, our souls were veritably touched by the spell of that wondrous genius who "was not for a day but for all time"!

So you see, I end on a note of praise. And, indeed, I am very glad that I saw this really, truly Elizabethan representation of "The Tempest" by William Shakespeare (or *Shakspere*), for which I make my best compliments to Mr.

MANNAHATTA

John Corbin, the talented producer. The chance was one, I am convinced, that will not soon occur again.

Going back to my hotel after the play, *Caliban's* speech to *Trinculo*—"Thou art a god and bearest celestial liquor"—kept ringing in my head. And I reflected how the Bard always gives his deepest word to the fool in his plays; not, we may be sure, without a profound or even divine significance. For Shakespeare himself was a god and bore a liquor celestial; that he sometimes tipsified himself with it, like *Stephano*, is true enough and only goes to prove that even the gods have their penalties.

Sir Herbert Tree's "Shylock"

"THIS IS the Jew
That Shakespeare drew,"

rhymed Pope after seeing Quin in the character of *Shylock*. What a famous character it is, entwined with what memories of histrionic renown; the glory of the English stage, from Betterton to Kean! And what a play, exhibiting the great

[42]

SHAKESPEARE TERCENTENARY

Poet's mastery of passion, with a weaving throughout of golden fancy! Is't not in itself an estate rich as a kingly reversion, and would not we, like the lady *Olivia*, rather lose half our dowry than see mischance come to it? . . .

This is all very well, but certain Americanized Hebrews have no sort of use for the Jew that Shakespeare drew, declaring the same to be a libel on their kind. Much of the poetry thereof is as hateful to them as was the screaming of the wry-necked fife to *Shylock* himself, though so pleasing to young *Jessica*. They will not stand for the Jew of Venice, and they have made protest against the study of the play in the public schools of Washington.

That there is a strong touch of exaggeration in *Shylock* need not be disputed. Shakespeare wrote at a time when mediæval notions about the Jews still prevailed universally. *Shylock's* demand for the literal satisfaction of his bond—the flesh from over *Antonio's* heart—is doubtless in strict keeping with the popular sixteenth or seventeenth century conception of the Jew. People in the England of Shakespeare's time had no more love for the Chosen Race, and as little regard for their feel-

MANNAHATTA

ings, as present-day Russians who still accuse them of ritual murder and other abominations.

It is regrettable, of course, that Shakespeare had such narrow views and brutal prejudices, but it need not be pointed out to our Jewish friends that literature was greatly the gainer thereby. A milder conception of *Shylock* would have given us a weaker play, the strength of the piece depending upon the exaggerated ferocity of the Jew. But what images this over-imagined truculence and malignity of *Shylock* lent to his creator! What tragic truth in this personification of a hated and proscribed race that yet was feared as well as hated, and knew how on occasion to collect its revenge! *Shylock* seems as great as Holy Writ (which is also charged with certain defects and exaggerations). The creation of this character remains one of the lofty monuments of human genius. Those misguided persons who condemn it or insult at it put themselves in a hopelessly absurd position, like that of an ant, say, defecating against one of the pyramids!

For great literature is above all racial grudges and susceptibilities, and anything savouring of an attack upon it, in the interest of a clan or a

SHAKESPEARE TERCENTENARY

prejudice, challenges resentment on every hand. I remember that Heine, himself a Jew, was a great admirer of this play and made a wonderful study of it. He very evidently did not regard *Shylock* as a libel on his ancient race, conceived in mere sordid Jew-hatred, but rather esteemed him as one of the great achievements of Shakespeare. I recommend those Washington Hebrew-Americans to read Heine's remarks on *Shylock* in his book entitled "The Women of Shakespeare." It may induce them to withdraw from their present position, which is apt to bring odium upon the Jewish people.

By the way, why don't these ultra-sensitive Jews protest *Fagin* in Dickens's "Oliver Twist"? It seems to me they might do so with much stronger reason. Yet we have just seen, under Jewish management, too, a great revival of the play made from Dickens's story, in which the terrible *Fagin* was the chief character. Compared to Dickens's red Jew steeped in all manner of crime, Shakespeare's *Shylock* is fit company for the Rothschilds and the Zionists.

It is not generally known that Dickens sketched his *Riah*, the benevolent Jew in "Our Mutual

MANNAHATTA

Friend," as a sort of reparation and *amende* for *Fagin*. The character is one of his weakest, and may serve as a warning against the literary apology. . . .

Having seen Mr. Corbin's *Shakspeare*, I decided I would plunge on the Tercentenary and take in Sir Herbert Tree's Shakespeare. This worshipful Knight of the drama was formerly known as Herbert Beerbohm Tree, but in the process of ennoblement he dropped the middle name, or perhaps sunk it in the Atlantic on his voyage to us. The matter is not important anyway, though I have no doubt that Sir Herbert's title had much to do with filling his houses. There be many New Yorkers who would rather see a real live British Knight than Shakespeare himself in the flesh, were the alternative possible. This was acutely understood and fully taken advantage of by the management.

I saw this titled and eminent actor in only one play, the "Merchant of Venice," and it may not be fair to judge him from a single performance. I can at least begin by complimenting him:—he is a master of stage-craft, an excellent producer.

SHAKESPEARE TERCENTENARY

Thank goodness, he did not attempt to show us the "Merchant" as it was presented in Shakespeare's time, but gave it with all the scenic and mechanical accessories of the modern stage. I was very glad thereat, for to be quite frank, I can see that a steady course of imitation Globe Theatre might pall on the most enthusiastic Shakespearian.

So we had a superb, realistic setting for this famous play, which I think helped out not a little, even with Shakespeare as the author. There was the very Rialto itself (what scene more celebrated?) where *Shylock* was wont to be rated for his usances by *Antonio*, and where he whispered to *Tubal* his dream of revenge. There were the flashing waterways of Venice, with real gondolas gliding through them, bearing happy lovers along the moonlight-silvered paths. Here was the Ghetto, and there *Shylock's* "sober house," just as they must have been in that reality which Shakespeare transferred to immortal romance. And for a proof, see *Jessica*, the daughter of *Leah*, looking from her window upon the carnival fooleries, despite her father's injunction; the while she is intent for the signal of young *Lorenzo*.

Yes, I know it must all have happened as

MANNAHATTA

Shakespeare tells it:—*Jessica* at her window, plotting to betray her father, convinces me; and her treachery, though it seem to be but lightly touched, is the deepest note in the play.

And here I will hazard an observation that may challenge protest. I believe that even good Christians have scant sympathy with the false daughter of *Shylock*, whose light-hearted treason is so strongly contrasted with her father's iron character and inflexible purpose. Shakespeare has endowed the Jew with so much genius that, in spite of prejudice that is of our very blood, he wins a large measure of our sympathy. We almost wish that *Jessica* were not of his house (one cannot imagine a Jew looking at her without a clutching of the throat). Belmont bridals are very well, but this Jew has suffered much and he interests us more than a parcel of fortune-hunters and bad debtors. Nay, we are not so sure that this honest *Antonio* (who will take a man's money yet spit upon him!) is either hero or martyr, with his bosom theatrically bared to give *Shylock* his pound of flesh. The crushing award of *Portia* (a poor enough quibble, by the way), the taunts of the Venetians baiting the Jew in his wild grief and rage—a

[48]

SHAKESPEARE TERCENTENARY.

veritable piece of the ancient Israel—leave us strangely cold. We are all-absorbed in that tragic figure, and we recognize that *Shylock* is the true hero of the scene.

Did Shakespeare intend it to be so? Not if we must accept the traditional interpretation of his play, which faithfully reflects the crude prejudices of his time. I think Shakespeare, with his wondrous illusive genius, made this play of seeming purpose to please the mob, while he entrusted the secret of his real feelings to *Shylock* who, though defeated, still remains the one great figure in the piece. This is, at any rate, the paradox of the “Merchant of Venice,” and I think the Jews are very foolish who protest this play, which is actually a superb compliment to the Chosen People. But I don’t blame any of them for wanting to wring the neck of that slippery little *Jessica*.

Mr. Tree’s acting was strong and intelligent, but it seemed to me to have few moments of real greatness. His *Shylock* was less commanding in his rage and ruthless purpose than pathetic in his weakness and defeat. No doubt, this falling off was mainly due to a voice whose lack of resonance and colour terribly handicaps this actor for

MANNAHATTA

the great rôles of Shakespeare. But, like the late Henry Irving, he indemnifies us with his skill as a producer and his mastery of stage-craft. His visit should have a good effect on theatrical conditions in this country, but I doubt if it will do much to revive the Shakespearian drama. The raw truth is that listening to the same seems too much like work to the "tired business man," and, as I have hinted above, the language is often obscure or positively unintelligible to a great majority of the public. Besides, each generation loves to see itself mirrored on the stage, and the classic never has a chance with the contemporary, whatever the disparity of merit. So it need not hurt us overmuch to admit that New York prefers "Potash and Perlmutter" or the Ziegfeld "Follies" to the best acted play of Shakespeare. After all, I am not sure that the public is greatly at fault. It will do no good to insist upon the tyranny of the classics. In time Shakespeare must pass from the stage where he has lorded it so long: can we pretend that he is not already all but gone in this country? Do you suppose that we shall still be presenting his plays when the fourth Centenary comes round? Do you fancy that, with

[50]

SHAKESPEARE TERCENTENARY

the constant change and corruption of language, New York will understand him any better in the year Two thousand and sixteen? Nay, I conclude in the words of a modest but estimable author: *
“Though it be certainly true that Shakespeare was not for a day but for all time, yet is change written upon all things, and the stage will one day be closed to the mightiest of its monarchs. Never, we may be sure, the Book in which he rules the hearts and the imaginations of men.”

A Shakespearian Exhibit

ALSO I gave myself the pleasure of looking over the Exhibition of Shakespeariana at the New York Public Library which, by the way, is the finest classic structure in the City:—a splendid testimony to the truth that the world has not been able to advance a step beyond “the beauty that was Greece.”

Here were shown early prints of Shakespeare's plays and poems, the famous First Folio (valued at thousands of dollars) spurious works attributed to him, books that he had read and used as

* See “At the Sign of the Van,” page 272.

MANNAHATTA

“sources,” books containing allusions to him, etc., etc. Of the last mentioned, none interested me so much as Greene’s “Groatsworth of Wit,” published in 1592, a stupid thing which has been immortalized by its attack upon Shakespeare. He was only twenty-eight when the envious Greene likened him to “an upstart Crow beautified with our feathers . . . in his own conceit the only Shake-scene in the countrie.” This was maybe the very book, the identical page which exposed the taunt to Shakespeare’s eye, and no doubt caused that eye to flash and the poet’s cheek to pale. Glory and Envy are here strangely met again after the lapse of three centuries.

I was most interested in the books printed during Shakespeare’s lifetime, texts of his Plays and Poems which he himself saw and handled. How carelessly they were thrown upon the world, those offspring of his mighty genius! His Poems were thought more of than his Plays, it is said, and his concern for the former proves that he himself shared this preference. Among those who missed the greatness of William Shakespeare was the man himself! This was, no doubt, because of his preternatural facility. He seems to have produced

SHAKESPEARE TERCENTENARY

his wonderful works without agony or exhaustion; and his fellow-players testify that they received his papers without a blot in them.

It is hard enough to believe, for Shakespeare's supreme greatness is in his passion, and the children of passion should bear the marks of their paternity. However this may be, I will remark that the total effect of this exhibit was to raise an overwhelming sense of the identity of the Man and the Poet. I was never a Baconian, in faith, sweet William having possessed me from my fifteenth year; but the perverse folly of those who would rob the great Poet of his due, in the presence of these testimonies, struck me as a thing outrageous beyond parallel. As I say, I myself never doubted Shakespeare, for I learned him young when the heart has more wisdom than the head. Yes, I came under that mighty spell in boyhood, and I have always regarded it as the best part of my education and the most fruitful adventure of my mental life.

The portraits of the Poet shown in this collection call for a special word. One would like to believe that the so-called Griffin Portrait of Shakespeare is an authentic likeness. Although but re-

MANNAHATTA

cently discovered, or at least made public, it is said to have been for two hundred years in the possession of the Griffin family in Northamptonshire. It is further alleged that the Bard's paternal great-grandmother was a Griffin. I do not know whether the experts will allow this claim, and I must say the legend strikes me as more romantic than probable. The point, as I have said, is one for the antiquarians to decide. But I would be glad to accept this Portrait as the true presentment of Shakespeare. It seems to be an idealized composite of the Chandos and Droeshout pictures, painted by an artist of genius. It is beautiful, fresh, living—alas, too much so to compel the fullest faith. There is a certain quite indescribable royal dignity in the eyes—one feels that Shakespeare *must* have looked so. Those eyes seemed to follow me with their proud yet gracious smile; and when at length I withdrew from the room I did not turn my back upon them.

Does not one so retire from the presence of a King?

MANNAHATTA II



MANNAHATTA II

SPAGHETTI

*Dis carus ipsis, quippe ter et quater
Anno revisens aequor Atlanticum
Impune; me pascunt olivæ,
Me cichorea levesque malvæ.
—Horace, Lib. 1-31.*

*Dear to the very gods themselves
(Since never vainly do I troth 'em)
And three or four times o' the year
Levanting down to Gotham;
Me the tart olive nourisheth,
With other such confetti,
And one thing Flaccus quite forgot,
Italia's pride—spaghetti!*

I CONFESS to a great partiality for it.
The place where you get it *right*, at least
to my taste, is a modest Italian table d'hôte in
Twenty-seventh Street, just off Broadway. Here
it is served as the *pièce de résistance* of a dinner

MANNAHATTA II

that costs you one dollar, plus a two-bit piece. Bigger and more showy places there be a-plenty, where you pay a fancier price and the vermicular cereal is dished up with more frills and fussiness; but the essential spaghetti,—the *thing in itself*, to speak philosophically,—will not be so good. The difference is one of savouriness and relish; a cook's secret which holds many faithful to the little bodega in Twenty-seventh Street.

Here, too, the soup (which seems to contain all the Horatian vegetables, and a few beside for good measure) is of an extraordinary virtue; while as for drink, you may command a sound Brolio or Antinori. (I do not mention Italian sweet wines, for I never could abide them.) Either of the wines named, moderately dry and not overheating, makes an excellent table beverage or *vin ordinaire*. My own practice, which has classical warrant, is to dilute the wine about one-half, and taken this way I have never known any bad effects to result from it. The Italians, by the way, are brought up in the daily use of their native wines, and as every one knows, they are an exceptionally temperate people. In this country, however, they drink more beer than wine. But though we may not

[58]

SPAGHETTI

agree as to all this, the reader must grant me that without wine there is no Italian dinner. One might as well think to leave out the spaghetti!

In a word, you can dine excellently for a couple of dollars, and if you are content with beer or native vintages, the damage will be less. The point is worth noting in view of the exaggerated stuff put forth by newspaper writers who are better acquainted with Childs's than with Sherry's or Delmonico's. There is, of course, no end of dining places where the prices are made especially for snobs and free spenders, places that flatter the fool's purse as well as his vanity; but such are not our present concern.

During my fat years in and about Gotham (oh yes, I had a few, reader) I sometimes stole a peep into the Book of the great Brillat-Savarin and learned a little of the hedonistic science of eating. 'Tis a sin I readily pardon myself since it had the salutary effect of confirming my devotion to the simple life, to which I always returned with the heartier relish after a whirl with the Gadarenes. Well, I have often fared more sumptuously but never more wholesomely and enjoyably than at the little *caupona* mentioned above, where I like

MANNAHATTA II

to think the soup has a distinct Horatian flavour, and the wine, one can easily make believe, is of the true Falernian brand. Anyhow, if these be vanities and illusions, they are not at least charged to you in the bill; they cost nothing extra, and they add unspeakably to the pleasures of association. I am not sure that the great Brillat-Savarin has mentioned it, but in the business of dining well the mind and the imagination must first be appealed to, and in truth the stomach plays only a subsidiary part:—when it gets control it *eats the man!*

Nowadays, whatever occasion may call me to New York, I am pretty apt to reckon upon treating myself to a *real* Italian dinner, with the genuine spaghetti made in Italy. Oh, of course, I insist upon that! . . .

Now, what do you think? I had scribbled thus far, and my mouth was deliciously watering at the prospect of spaghetti, when a disquieting rumour reached me. It seems that, owing to the War—every annoyance nowadays is charged to the War—this famous Italian spaghetti, like the beer of Munich, is no longer procurable in this country, and what we get, and have had for some

[60]

NEWYORKITIS

time past, actually comes from Russia. Can this be true? The idea of Russian spaghetti is not inspiring, to say the least, but I swear I could not detect any difference in fibre or flavour, on my last visit to Town. Another illusion? But I am not shaken for all that:—I still cry, *Viva spaghetti!*

NEWYORKITIS

SOME YEARS ago a man of physic by the name of Girdner made a frenzied bid for fame by publishing the diagnosis of a disease which he called *Newyorkitis*. The thing had been observed before that and some of the symptoms described, but Girdner was rightfully awarded caveat, as he was the first to identify it as a distinct malady and give it a name.

Like other great benefactors of humanity, Girdner had small reward for his pains, and after a three days' wonder he was forgotten. Not long ago, I am told, he succumbed to *Newyorkitis*, thus by a strange fatality falling prey to the dread disease of which he had been the virtual discoverer.

MANNAHATTA II

Meanwhile, the terrible plague (for it is nothing less) continues to extend its ravages and to add to the appalling total of its victims. No other result could indeed be looked for, seeing the lack of intelligent therapeutics and the constantly increasing population of the Great City.

Girdner is perhaps in his grave where, it may be hoped, that after life's fitful *Newyorkitis* he sleeps well. His book sleeps even more soundly, and the warnings which he voiced a short decade ago are unheeded and forgotten. I hate to rush into the breach, dear friends, but somebody will have to lead the forlorn hope. So here goes!

What, then, is *Newyorkitis*? It is, as its name certifies, a special kind of disease to which New Yorkers are liable. Many are its manifestations, and a deranged sense of the relative importance of things is one of the most familiar symptoms. The afflicted person never suspects that anything is wrong with him and often remarks, *apropos* of nothing, that "little old New York has the rest of the Cosmos beaten to a frazzle," whatever that may mean.

Girdner erred, I believe, in ascribing *Newyorkitis* largely to the varied and infernally torturing

[62]

NEWYORKITIS

noises of the city. These have their effect, no doubt, and the nerve-grinding horror of the subways, in particular, writes itself in certain forms of the malady. But if Girdner were living to-day he would have to admit that more potent and malefic agents are to be traced to the Yellow Press, the mad chase of the dollar, and above all, the universal sex-lunacy. Different in kind as are these engendering causes, they lead ultimately to the same thing, and that is *Newyorkitis*.

The Yellow Journalist makes broad his phylacteries and writes but one word upon them—Sex! His fellow, the theatre manager, has nothing else on his playbills but Sex! And while there are many reasons for hunting the dollar in New York, the dominant one is Sex!

Therefore, I think Dr. Girdner might have made a stronger point as to the share which the epidemic sex-obsession has in bringing on *Newyorkitis*. As I remember, the learned man does not mention this at all, a thing that seems to me inexplicable. For to a lay mind the devouring preoccupation with sex, to which the newspapers cater so grossly and untiringly, would seem to be responsible for the worst phases of the disease,

MANNAHATTA II

such as paresis, erotomania, hircinitis, marital dissatisfaction, divorce, drunkenness, etc. All these and many kindred things are the fruit of our unashamed devotion to the great goddess Lubricity as certainly as the fig tree beareth in her kind.

OLD MEN FOR LOVE

IN NEW YORK it is the custom of Everyman and his Best Girl or his Wife or (*s'il vous plaît*) some one that may be nor wife nor maid, to dine several times a week at some favoured restaurant or hotel. This gregarious feeding is a strong point with the typical Gothamite, and it may go far to explain that virtual abandonment of the "home idea" which is a marked feature of life in the Metropolis. Anyhow, it solicits us as a distinct symptom of *Newyorkitis* to make a note right here on a certain phase of the morals and manners of the Big Town; which we proceed to do with our customary circumspection.

Kipling has observed in a well-known poem that—

Old men love while young men die.

OLD MEN FOR LOVE

And he explains the reason why in an ingenious fable. Whether the poet fabled truly or not,—whether it is *because* young men die, it is very certain that old men love. And one is tempted to say that they seem to have the preference in woman-worshipping Gotham.

So at least you might infer from even a casual review of the night life of the Town. At all the swell cafés where the sexes meet for the pleasant business of guzzling and gorging, the call is obviously for oldish or elderly men and young women. An unsophisticated looker-on would suppose any but the true relationship between all these grey and blonde or brunette heads so snugly tête-à-tête under the twinkling lusters, with that before them which stimulates appetite and enjoyment in persons of all ages. The seasoned New Yorker looks on it as a matter of course, and seldom ascribes a paternal or avuncular or even a marital relation to the grey-haired gallant. Not if he knows his New York.

Papas are not so flatteringly attentive, uncles not so affectionately devoted, husbands not so lover-like and languishing. Oh, no! and persons

MANNAHATTA II

of ill-assorted ages in legal or family bonds do not have such a good time together.

Then, you say, these old men and young women are all——? Pshaw, let's not bother what they are, except that they are—having a good time! This is little old New York where people mind their own business or had better. *Voilà!*

Certainly these highly fed, well-groomed oldsters seem to know the game, and if you watch them a while you will wonder less at the strange preference of their fair companions. Do not old men beat young men at most games of patience and stratagem and cunning? And is not love pre-eminently such a game? Tut, tut! these fair young things know quite well what they are about. They are not so uncalculating as they look, not by a good half. In truth there is a shrewd purpose behind their own play. The old lover is gentle and kind and indulgent; above all, generous. There may be a trifle too much gold in his teeth and too little hair on his head. That falsetto crack in his laugh, too, jars on one, like certain effects of light on his profile or the turkey-gobbler movement in his stringy neck. But he has the prestige and the experience of a hundred con-

[66]

OLD MEN FOR LOVE

quests; and he never hurries you with the rough impetuosity of youth; and he's really splendid company, though his talk *is* a little boresome; and though an old fool, of course, he's not nearly so exacting as a young fool would be—and, in short, he is IT. (Newyorkese for *comme il faut*.)

You remark that the young women seem proud of their elderly cavaliers and carry themselves with a more pronounced air of assurance than as if they were companioned by younger men. Yes, they seem palpably more sure of themselves—of their charm and their power. Is this perhaps the true underlying motive of their preference for lovers or “friends” who might be their fathers—even grandfathers are not out of the reckoning. Woman's vanity may well be at the bottom of this as of other anomalies. Age is (of course) a potent inspirer of confidence.

So much for the psychology of those who go down to fish and be fished for in cafés, where the Belly-God and other divinities of the flesh are frankly worshipped. But *their* affair is not a complex matter—the problem really sounds profounder depths of human nature than are to be studied in this gay world of light and sensuality

MANNAHATTA II

and pleasure. It is one that radically marks the difference between the sexes. Since the morning of time young women have freely given themselves to old men; young men have rarely given themselves to old women. We revolt at the fact, as we revolt at that other fact, equally shocking and indisputable, that modesty is much less native to women than we pretend to believe by a useful social convention. Still both facts remain to set us hunting occasionally for reasons that shall satisfy inquiring or unsophisticated youth.

Fogazzaro, the Italian novelist, in his book, "The Saint," seeks to make out that certain old men exert a mystical attraction upon young women, and there are surely instances a-plenty in both sacred and profane history to support his theory. However, the mystical attraction with which the world is generally familiar in such cases usually takes the form of what is vulgarly called the "mazuma." Lacking that, the old man has the hardest kind of a game to play, and the instances in which he wins out are too few to be counted. But he commonly has the money, by virtue of his age and wisdom; and ever since that gay old trifler Jupiter appeared to a pleasing

[68]

THE CRAZE FOR BEAUTY

young woman in a shower of gold, this form of temptation has proven irresistible to the sex. So long, then, as beauty deigns to dollars this apparent perversion of nature will continue and the poet's mournful refrain hold true—

*“Old men love while young men die!”**

THE CRAZE FOR BEAUTY

NEW YORK is gone daft on the subject of female beauty. Many and strange are the tokens of its madness. The present *carmagnole* or craze for the tango, etc., may be noted as one of the most virulent symptoms. *Venus victrix* smiles at the ineffectual opposition of the preachers and moralists. It was always thus, she says to herself a little wearily.

Beauty is the engrossing theme of the popular newspapers, whole pages being given up to it and experts employed to develop its every erotic phase.

Priestesses of the modern Aphrodite boldly

* In order to complete this picture of New York's night life the foregoing brief chapter is borrowed from the Author's "At the Sign of the Van."

MANNAHATTA II

unveil the art and mystery of female attraction. The flagging hopes of the plain woman are revived from day to day by fresh hints and expedients. Female vanity is kept worked up to a pitch of exacerbation, which plays hob with the economies of the male kind. All of which is very profitable to the newspapers, the vendors of cosmetics and the department stores.

Women are told that their chief end and duty in life is to make themselves beautiful. A celebrated opera singer and divorcée advises them that in order to preserve the shape they should (if married) bear only one child and that at forty!

Actresses are induced by flattering cheques to divulge their alleged "beauty secrets," and their articles—at least those written for them—are gotten up with remarkable abandon. It is clearly no care of milady's if they cause pangs of desire in any manly breast. If she was inclined to opulence of flesh, we are told in text and picture how she kept her curves within the beauty zone. If of a tendency to meagreness, how she plumps herself out to what is technically termed a "broiler."

We are permitted to see milady in the various phases of the toilet, and in none is she chary of

THE CRAZE FOR BEAUTY

exposure. An odour of rice-powder seems to rise from the elaborate detail and depiction of her charms.

Society ladies figure very prominently in this vulgar exhibition for the corruption of the masses. Beauty is not, alas! a strong point with the smart dames of the Four Hundred, but the fact does not seem to qualify their passion for displaying themselves *en décolletée*. It is evident that they make it very easy for the journalist to get their portrait. The journalist rather more than reciprocates the courtesy, for he is always pleased to make room for milady's pet Pomeranian in the picture. Woman and dog, no doubt, contribute vastly to the simple pleasures of the multitude.

Every visiting foreigner is asked to give his impressions of the American woman, her beauty, style, etc. If his remarks fall short of the usual exaggeration, the newspaper "edits" them into acceptableness. If uncomplimentary—that is, strictly veracious—they are usually suppressed.

But perhaps a plain man may be allowed to ask, without offence, where is all the beauty that the newspapers talk about?

Nothing is so common as the newspaper phrase,

MANNAHATTA II

a beautiful woman: few things are more rare than the actual sight of one. Perhaps in a normal lifetime one does not see a score of women really deserving to be so called. Art is nothing like so fortunate; the classic past afforded but one Venus de Medici!

Where, oh where is all the beauty? . . .

I strolled for hours on Fifth Avenue and saw little or nothing of this overflowing and superabundant plenty of female pulchritude. It is true I saw many women whose style of dress, or partial undress, advertised the fact that they deemed themselves beautiful; but that is a different matter.

The old adage that a modest woman is known by her dress, must be terribly out of date, for modesty was the one thing not suggested by the styles of costume referred to. What they did suggest and literally throw in your face, was the allurements of sex. That at least is indisputable (I suppose) whatever one may think of the alleged beauty so fulsomely harped upon in the journals.

It is natural and proper that women should dress in a way to move the admiration of men,
[72]

THE CRAZE FOR BEAUTY

but not so as merely to emphasize the difference of sex. This leads to mistakes which might prove very embarrassing.

Heine tells of being in conversation with Balzac on the street in Paris one day when a lady of the most distinguished appearance passed by.

"She is a duchess at least," remarked the poet.

"Not at all," said the great romancer; "she is *une femme entretenue*" (a kept woman!) . . .

There were very few ladies on Fifth Avenue that afternoon who would have reminded any one of a duchess.

But there were many who made you think of chorus girls, odalisques, Cyprians, *filles de joie*, by their *allure* and manner of dressing. Unquestionably, they were for the most part virtuous women complying with the indecent fashions of the hour.

But is it not curious how the eternal Phryne always sets the modes for her virtuous sisters? Ah! what would they not risk to win something of her fabled charm and beauty?

The hazard at least is distressingly evident. . . .

MANNAHATTA II

CHANGES IN BABYLON

HARK YE now to the tale of a *laudator temporis acti*. Back in the 'Nineties, Fourteenth Street ranked with the "high spots" of the Town and was celebrated from Hoboken to the Golden Gate. When I knew it in that not-so-remote epoch, it seemed by night a roaring, coruscating artery of life and pleasure, especially young life that balked at no risks and no ginger, however hot i' the mouth, and pleasure that scorned to take thought of the morrow. Tammany Hall was there, and there also were the crude liberties deemed symbolical of the Tiger. From Second Avenue to Seventh you had what the fine writers call a microcosm of typical New York life. Visiting youth, eager for their novitiate of pleasure, plunged at once into Fourteenth Street, which as eagerly licked them up and called for more. Here was the Rialto, here were theatres and many weird species of amusements, freak shows, concert saloons and of a truth, drinking places galore. Tony Pastor (with whom the proper glory of vaudeville departed) had here his own theatre

CHANGES IN BABYLON

and reigned without a rival, while the Fourteenth Street Theatre flourished at the high tide of success. Here was Theiss's (famous or infamous, *n'importe*, 'tis but a memory) profiting by the exuberance of young life—Theiss's which many a pensive oldster will recall for the baptism it gave him. And perhaps there was not a single Babylonish rite lacking in the rubric of pleasure nightly rehearsed in those few crowded blocks of Fourteenth Street.

To-day all is for the most part changed. Fourteenth Street is deconstellated and, so to speak, taken from the map. It is practically dark at night and quiet as the Street of Deacons in a Vermont village; the tides of life and pleasure have swept beyond it, leaving it stranded and deserted. It still does a little show business in the daytime, mainly with the Moving Pictures, but an old frequenter of the 'Nineties would scarcely recognize it for the glory it was in the halcyon period here recalled. A little more time and the gloom of the encroaching warehouse district will effectually extinguish it. He that would seek the image of what Fourteenth Street was in the years of its glory must hie him northward to

MANNAHATTA II

the Great White Way. Even so, much that was characteristic is perished and gone forever. Manna-hatta devours her children; brief are their generation.

To an old-timer the eclipse of successive areas of the Town, as business drives pleasure before it, must be a melancholy sight:—is it not like seeing a tomb built over your best and happiest years? But such is the price we pay for the vaunted progress of the City: where there is fabulous wealth in the counters of Commerce some of us can only see the abomination of desolation. Trade puts forth her leaden mace and presto! all is changed as by magic. Huge loft buildings cover the site of cheerful theatres, darkness comes down where once the twinkling cressets made the night as bright as day.

And lo! even while we are mourning the desolation of Fourteenth Street, the same bitter portion has befallen Twenty-third in the onward march of Trade. Another bright artery of the City's life shut off and darkened. Gone are the theatres and the tripping feet of pleasure; gone the lady with the enigmatic smile advertising the Oldest Profession (she is more apt to be of the race of
[76]

CHANGES IN BABYLON

Rahab than she was twenty years ago). What havoc in our memories, in the ordered sequence of things! Here stood yesterday the Hoffman House, most celebrated of New York hotels, clustered thick with legends of statesmen, politicians, leaders of every sort, beauties and dandies. Where is it to-day? Swallowed with the Albemarle (memorable to me for that I first met there the famous "Mr. Dooley," then in his fulgent meridian): a monster of stone and iron towers above the familiar site, with not a wrinkle to show where they went down! The transformation is repeated on every hand. Places as famous and familiar as not long ago was Martin's at Twenty-sixth Street and Broadway, have vanished as though they had never been. Vainly shall you seek the Haymarket on Sixth Avenue (for sociological or other reasons)—'twas effaced by a spasm of reform. Even the 'Tenderloin—a whole district!—has gathered up its skirts and flown to the Fifties.

It seems our cue to follow:—the modest reader may rely upon the discretion of this personally conducted tour.

MANNAHATTA II

THE GREAT WHITE WAY

THE ROMANCERS of the daily press have dubbed the stretch of Broadway from Thirty-fourth to the Fifties the Great White Way, in allusion to the quantity of electric illumination in that section. Here or hereabouts are the principal theatres and many of the leading hotels, swell cafés, night resorts, etc., and here the pulse of temptation is supposed to beat a feverish tattoo. It is a gaudy, garish region, but an unbeautiful, spite of the romancing journalist; the electric signs, with all their prodigal waste of light, are hideous to the eye, and they insult the soul with base advertisements. They leap the dome of heaven in letters of fire to proclaim the virtues of a Chewing Gum or a Breakfast Food, of a St. Louis Beer or a Purgative Pill. They flagrantly typify and exploit a phase of the material mediocrity of New York—the catchpenny spirit which cheapens and degrades whatever it touches.

There are grand hotels—the grandest and surely the most expensive in America, in this region, but as a whole it is about as crazy and heterogeneous

THE GREAT WHITE WAY

as one could imagine. It betrays a people in whom there is no defined artistic sense; who may achieve something beautiful by accident or something monstrous by design. The lack of any ruling principle of beauty—even of mere order and regularity, of anything resembling a plan,—the jumbled, higgledy-piggledy character of the buildings and their environments, especially above Forty-second Street,—are a howling disgrace to a city of metropolitan pretensions. If I were asked to name a part of New York that should exhibit in microcosm most of her defects and, above all, the barbarism that cries out amid her marvellous display of wealth, I would name the Great White Way.

But if this region be grotesque by comparison with the splendid symmetry, the ordered magnificence of Paris or Vienna, it is not the less humanly interesting in its own fashion; and I cheerfully devote to it a few pages.

Here is the most celebrated habitat of the free spender in America and the *parc aux cerfs* of those who pursue delicately the lure of the flesh. In other words, this is a hothouse wherein strange fruits of pleasure are nursed to a perilous ma-

MANNAHATTA II

turity, concerning which stranger tales are told by men who do not seem the happier for the telling; such tales as may not even be hinted at in these discreet pages. In short, this is what the newspapers call the "amusement section" (elegant phrase!) of the Metropolis, and the amusements are varied to suit tastes the most perverse and exacting. That is as much as it is good for you to know, pudent reader!

Here is a large population that lives by pleasure, its means and procurements, and especially dedicate to what Kipling calls "love o' women." A hectic folk, cocottes, *souteneurs*, gamblers, men-about-town, rakes, wastrels, all mixed up in a humorous promiscuity. The grace of God is lacking among them, but there is, by compensation, a terrible zest of life. Here the "actor's face" seems native, and the dialect of the theatre salutes you on every hand; vaudevillians abound and the sharp-faced emissaries of the Sons of Sem. Here the young Ass pursues his peccadillo, often plucking therewith its penalty, and the Old Sinner fishes with a troubled eye. If the whole truth of what happens in this amusing district between midnight and five o'clock of any morning could be told—

THE GREAT WHITE WAY

well, I will only say that it would be very much more interesting than the romances of the Yellow Press.

And it was here I saw a sight that has remained before my mind's eye above all the spectacles that New York had to show me. I speak of the white feet on Broadway in the vivid centre of the Great White Way. Feet of young girls in white shoes, with shortened skirts. Twinkling feet, gliding feet. Here and there restlessly treading amid the crowds. Going and returning. Stopping now and then for a moment. Sometimes moving very swiftly and again strolling with leisurely pace. Twinkling white feet of young girls on Broadway. This was the most wonderful thing I saw during the night hours in New York.

These girls were quite young—some of them seemed mere children—and they were made up to accentuate their youth—that most coveted flower of the Great White Way. Most of them were beautiful, yet one was troubled at the first glance whether their beauty was of innocent, untarnished youth. Where were they going, those white feet on Broadway, and what errand called

MANNAHATTA II

them abroad that night? Were they hunting or hunted, pursuing or pursued? God knows.

But this I noticed, that very seldom were two of these girls together; they went their devious way single and unpaired; they might meet and greet each other, as they often did, but each would turn and go her way alone.

Little white feet on Broadway, threading the crowd so surely and fearlessly, walking amid snares and traps which the imagination dare not picture. Young faces passing suddenly that leave a strange pang at one's heart. Why this sorrow you cast upon us? Why this fear you leave with us in passing? Why this impulse to follow and save you from something we dare not name? White feet like gulls in the great human sea. Flying hither and thither. Now and again lost in the confluent crowds, but always emerging. Going and returning. Moving restlessly or stopping but for a moment. Ever apparently aimless and ever dreadfully intent on something we dare not name. As the hours passed you fluttered away finally—whither? Even as the gulls, it was impossible to track your flight; but one by one you went and did not return.

THE MORGAN LIBRARY

White feet on Broadway, do you trample any mother's heart—do you walk the ways of shame and death? Little white feet of young girls on Broadway, what were you seeking that night? . . . God knows!

THE MORGAN LIBRARY

IT IS generally allowed that the late J. Pierpont Morgan was a man of marked genius in several capacities; a giant among financiers, a business builder and organizer without an equal, a capitalist who combined imagination with the greatest practical sagacity. His wealth and power were the envy of all men and no doubt prevented the public from forming a just estimate of his character. Unquestionably, he dominated the public mind beyond any other private citizen of the Republic; there were times when, as during the money panic several years ago, he quite dwarfed even the President of the United States (who happened to be the egocentric Roosevelt).

Even in Europe Mr. Morgan excited nearly as much interest and was almost as grossly flattered by press and public. He was Mr. Morgan of

MANNAHATTA II

London quite as much as he was Mr. Morgan of New York. His financial projects were received with great favour and respect by the most conservative, and the highest nobles sought him as if to avail themselves of that Midas-touch which turned all things into gold. Mr. Morgan was not too proudly democratic to do business with them, and meantime he looked after an interest that was even dearer to his heart. Needless to recount here his wonderful campaigns as a collector by which he enriched the Metropolitan Museum with the costliest, most coveted art treasures of European galleries. This was his amusement rather than his work, but the genius of the man appeared no less in his *coups* as a collector than in his financial and industrial operations. He attracted to himself something of the greatness of the Medici; like a prince he gave and like a prince he acquired in the domain of Art.

I am not attempting here a eulogy of Mr. Morgan, and I believe that we know little enough about the real man:—the Morgan of the newspapers was largely a mythical person created by the dollar-worshipping journalist, for great as his wealth was, we know that it was exaggerated in

[84]

THE MORGAN LIBRARY,

the newspaper estimates. But I grant his splendid gifts to the cause of Art in this country, and I have a great admiration for the genius which acquired and the munificence which bestowed them. The question as to how his immense fortune was come by, or whether millionaires are as a class desirable, has nothing to do with my present subject.

Mr. Morgan, then, was a collector in the Grand Style, and nothing that he did or left behind him so strikingly attests his greatness in this aspect as his own Library in East Thirty-sixth Street. Here, in the very heart of the costliest section of New York, he raised a beautiful building—a classic marble structure—for the housing of such literary treasures and rarities as he prized too intimately to entrust to any public institution. He who had given so much to the public would yet keep something for himself; yet even in this possession he was not jealously exclusive, for he threw open the Library at times to scholars, authors, students and others capable of valuing the privilege—a policy which is continued with equal liberality by his son, the present J. P. Morgan. The building, its ground site and its treasures are esti-

MANNAHATTA II

mated at several millions of dollars; as a privately owned library, it is without an equal in the world. As I have said, it is undoubtedly Mr. Morgan's finest achievement in the Grand Style—the one that most signally compliments his genius.

The privilege of visiting the Library and inspecting some of its treasures—(it would require many visits to examine the collection in detail)—was accorded to me, and this I account the most fortunate incident of my brief sojourn in New York.

Mr. Morgan's chief pride was in his Library, and here he passed his happiest hours, according to Miss Belle Da Costa Greene, the charming and very capable Librarian. While showing me the things I most desired to see, she recalled personal traits of Mr. Morgan which did not agree at all with the image of the truculent financier projected by the newspapers. Always at Christmas time he made her read to him the "Christmas Carol" from Dickens's original manuscript. It is written, by the way, in a very small, crowded script, and I reckon that Miss Greene fully earned her large salary while she was so employed.

The original MSS. of famous English classics
[86]

THE MORGAN LIBRARY

are the most interesting feature of the Morgan Library. I allowed to myself that money was of some use, after all, when I was permitted to hold in my hands (not merely to look at them in a glass case) the very pages on which were first written poems that have possessed my heart from early youth. As I turn these precious leaves, still vital with inspiration though tarnished by time, I think there has been no great literature made since the typewriter—that arch-leveller and aid to mediocrity—has come into use. Here, for example, is the MS. of Tom Moore's "Lalla Rookh," traced in the minute, delicate hand of the Irish poet. How it recalls to me my first peep into that wondrous arabesque of poetry and music! I close my eyes and see the printed page before me as clearly as I did, an enchanted boy. And there are the sonorous opening lines of the "Veiled Prophet," as I have never forgotten them:—verily, old *Mokanna*, I would give somewhat to recover the years since our first meeting. Eagerly I look to see if they are the very same—

*In that delightful province of the sun,
The first of Persian lands he shines upon,*

MANNAHATTA II

*Where all the loveliest children of his beam,
Flow'rets and fruits, blush over every stream,
And fairest of all streams, the Murga roves
Among Merou's bright palaces and groves.*

Yes, the lines are indeed the same, and the flowing music, and perhaps the magic is still there for young hearts and eyes; but a chilling wind of time seems to blow from the page upon the present reader. Alas! life once dazzled even as this poem, and life, too, has faded. I put down *Mokanna* with a sigh, yet smiling at his awful wickedness which once filled my young dreams with terror. (I have since met unveiled Mokannas who were far more formidable.) Dear, kind, tuneful Tommy Moore, how could he think to create a terrible villain when all his witchery was love, moonlight and music? I turn a few more pages, and lo! I forgive him his *Mokanna* for "The Banks of the Calm Bendemeer"—an Irish melody, very slightly orientalized. Maybe it is not poetry at all, as some of the later finicky critics protest; but it caught me young, Messieurs, and your clever arguments do not touch the heart. Even now my faithful memory revives no small part of the old charm and—

THE MORGAN LIBRARY

*I think, is the nightingale singing there yet?
Are the roses still bright by the calm Bendeemer?*

I take up the original manuscript of the First Canto of "Don Juan" by the wicked Lord Byron, who was the adoration of my youth and whom (unlike so many wiser critics of my time) I have never abandoned. Do I love him so much because I can always find my youth in his pages? Perhaps; first loves in literature are apt to endure. And criticism is only relished by persons of middle age who have lost the *flair* for poetry and romance. Youth I am sure will never turn from the *Childe*.

And the spell of that strong spirit is freshly revived for me by the sight of this page which his own hand traced, under the full current of inspiration. Heigh-ho! once upon a time I knew dozens of these stanzas by heart, especially those dealing with the love scrapes of *Juan*, and my naughty schoolmates used to bribe me to recite them. I had to read the book by stealth, my father regarding Byron as the Devil himself! I have never thought to forbid him to my own children, and in point of fact, I can't see the "Satanism" with which he has been charged. There be writers more

MANNAHATTA II

dangerous than my Lord Byron, if I know anything of literature. And I'm glad I read him young, for no poetry has ever affected me with stronger impressions than parts of the "Don," Childe Harold, Mazeppa, the Siege of Corinth, Parisina, and the Prisoner of Chillon.

Also I am glad that my Lord Byron lived before the typewriter; the poet working and transcribing with the *pen* is more apt to start miracles. Byron writes as with a sword; his script, bold, dashing, irregular, is entirely characteristic of his genius.

I saw Byron's own copy of the first edition of the early cantos of "Don Juan," published by Galignani of Paris. The poet has made an autograph note where Don Alfonso is described as having surprised Juan with his wife. Ask Miss Greene to show it you; it's really worth while.

Keats and Shelley are represented by manuscript originals of their choicest poems, and there is a lock of Keats's hair, brown and glossy as when it was cut from his head. Upon first seeing it, the late Richard Watson Gilder fainted and Charles Hanson Towne threw off a sonnet on the spot. It is perhaps the most expensive lock of

IN NUBIBUS

hair in the world. Oh, it is useful to have money if you wish to collect such things.

I like to think of the great J. Pierpont Morgan recreating himself among these literary treasures, and having the "Christmas Carol" read to him from the author's manuscript. It's a picture that inclines one to believe, after all, in the essential humanness of our millionaires—a thing that is popularly scouted. But then, Mr. Morgan was a man of genius!

IN NUBIBUS

GENTLE READER, if you are thinking perchance that we have sometimes dived low in the preceding pages, seeking life at its rankest and fullest, I propose to soar high with you as a fitting climax to this truthful narrative. Take a long breath, for you will need your best wind. Now then! . . .

Up—up—up amid the clouds and the keen sunshine, eight hundred feet above the solid ground of Manhattan; higher than the builders of Babel climbed in their impious project to outwit the watchful Yahveh.

MANNAHATTA II

Steady, my reader!—we have shot up sixty stories, and are now standing on the topmost turret of the Woolworth Building, the greatest of the stone giants of New York and, I dare say, taken all-in-all, the most wonderful structure dedicate to business uses in the world.

In the foregoing pages I have sought to avoid the subject of money and especially millions of money, which is mouthed to disgust by the newspapers and New York guide-books, etc. But here I am content to mark an exception. For high as we have ascended, we can't get above this fact—that the Woolworth was builded of the nickels and dimes of the plain American people! It is of these nickels and dimes poured forth from thousands of scanty purses that I think rather than of the celebrated Five-Million-Dollar check which Mr. Woolworth is said to have given in part payment for his building. Dear man, he must have had many a white night while raising his Jacob's Ladder to heaven with the small coins of the poor. But his achievement more than repaid him, we may well believe; it exemplifies the romance of commerce which we owe now and then to exceptional men. Certainly the Woolworth

[92]

IN NUBIBUS

ranks with the half-dozen most wonderful sights of New York. It is not simply an immense stone cylinder raised on a framework of steel, as many of these great buildings are: it has beauty and harmony of parts in an uncommon degree, and an individuality of style which literally puts it in a class by itself. In a word, the architecture of the Woolworth exhibits genius instead of daring of the freak order, which latter we are too much used to expect. I know of nothing in New York to compare with the effect the rich and yet grandly simple façade produces. As splendid as a battleship, I would say—if I may be allowed the simile. (This merely as a parenthesis while the reader is getting his second wind.)

Looking from our lofty turret, we seem to be in the car of a balloon, so great is the height, while the mighty Metropolis at our feet is dwindled to a checker-board.

Far below us a golden ball sparkles—it is the dome of the “World” Building, not so many years ago reputed the chief wonder of this section of Manhattan. Soaring many stories higher, but still falling far short of our supreme isolation, is the Titan that men name the Singer Building; and

MANNAHATTA II

more remote we mark the graceful campanile of the Metropolitan, outstripped by us a sheer hundred feet. All other so-called sky-scrappers, tremendous and towering, regarded from an ordinary standpoint, have dropped out of the race *ad nubes*. The Woolworth is first and the rest—nowhere!

Here be altitudes, my masters. From this wind-crannying eyrie how comically shrunken and diminished appear many of the Great City's marvels! Old Jacob of the Silver Ladder, you are spoiling a lot of poetry for us. Down there in the harbour, sadly shorn of majesty from our pride o' place, rises (should I not rather say, *sinks*?) Liberty with her torch. Certes, she appears to be *going down*, from past conceptions, for she is full five hundred feet below us; yet, pedestal and all, she reaches the respectable stature of three hundred feet!

Everything seems reduced on the same scale—we are Brobdingnagians looking down upon Lilliput. The far-famed Brooklyn Bridge?—tut, tut, a mere hand's breadth, and the East River—a puny creek. Mighty ships ride at anchor in the Bay, but they appear as cock-boats from this
[94]

IN NUBIBUS

height—we are looking through the wrong end of the glass for wonderment.

Lower Manhattan seems paved with children's playing blocks—these are the houses and ordinary structures. We look straight down on Park Place and Broadway:—automobiles flit about, ant-size, and our fellow-humans are too small to be taken into account. It is the megalomania of the gods, for nothing below seems equal to ourselves or even worthy of our notice.

No sounds reach us from the turmoil of traffic, the roar of the human diapason in the streets far beneath—yet is it the noisiest quarter of the Great City; not a wave mounts to us from the leaping human tempest where Stentor could scarce make himself audible. We have won to the silence of the greater heights.

Even so the gods must look down from Olympus, despising the ant-like beings on the earth, who think to reach them with their vain prayers and to propitiate them with foolish adoration: from their supreme height, hearing not a whisper of the earthly tumult and untouched, save to laughter and contempt, by all the vicissitudes of the human spectacle. . . .

MANNAHATTA II

Guy de Maupassant tells us that he left Paris once for a long journey because he had commenced to fear the Eiffel Tower would fall upon him. Contrariwise, I felt that the Woolworth was quite solid and safe when regretfully, at the end of my seven days, I bade farewell to Mannahatta. Pardon!—*Au revoir*, of course.

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES



PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

ONE

BALZAC THE LOVER

WRITING TO his beloved sister, Laure, in the midst of his first obscure literary efforts, Balzac said: "I have none of the flowers of life, and yet I am in the season when they bloom! What is the good of fortune and joys when youth is past? Of what use the actor's garments if one does not play the rôle? The old man is one who has dined and looks at others eating. I am young and my plate is empty, and I am hungry, Laure! Will ever my two only, immense desires—to be famous and to be loved—be satisfied?"

They were, in a fashion memorable enough—and this was the life-tragedy of Honoré de Balzac.

It is said that there have been nearly as many books, essays, monographs written upon the great French novelist as upon Shakespeare, and there

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

is yet no let-up to this torrent of literature called forth by one of the greatest of its masters. The fact is eloquent of the supremacy of Balzac, seeing that Shakespeare had over two hundred years the start of him and that he worked in what is regarded as a higher domain of letters.

Scarcely less interesting is the fact that the greater part of the literature which in several tongues has swelled the Balzac "legend," deals mainly with the man's life and personality. It is much to say, but the remark may be ventured, that the "Human Comedy" is in some danger of being eclipsed in point of interest by the author thereof. Sixty-six years after his death in a tragic despair that he was not suffered to complete his giant task, Balzac has entered upon a harvest of fame of which even he never dreamed. "Glory," he once wrote, "is the sun of the dead;" —that sun is now fully risen upon the builder of the "Human Comedy."

BALZAC'S STUDIES of women in his novels, especially the greater ones, throw a vivid light upon his artistic daring and originality. Whatever faults of overdrawing might be charged

[100]

BALZAC THE LOVER

to them, they must be recognized for what they were on their first appearance,—a new departure in fiction and the work of a master mind. In Balzac's gallery of women the daughters of Lilith abound more than the saints; we have nothing in English fiction to compare with them—as in truth, we have no writer (I do not say novelist, he was more than that) who has approached Balzac's achievement. In view, therefore, of the Frenchman's attitude toward the women of his books, the question of his personal relations with the enigmatic sex becomes of mordant interest.

Thanks to the searchlight scrutiny to which the life and memorials of Balzac have been subjected in recent years, we have learned more than his contemporaries knew or suspected.

For one thing, we have discredited the legend of personal chastity and continence which he was at so great pains to set up concerning Honoré de Balzac! He wished the world to believe that because of this virtue, very uncommon among Frenchmen, he was able to perform and to continue his immense labours. Chastity, he declared, was the secret reservoir of creative power, the source of those divinations which stamp the man of genius; it

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

even implied certain occult faculties, as he sought to show in "Cousin Pons." In conversation with his friends, as in his writings, the theme was a favourite one with our hero, and Gautier (who was not personally inclined toward the theory) tells us that a half-hour meeting with the Beloved *once a year* was the utmost indulgence Balzac would allow to a literary artist. He would not hear of instances of famous writers noted for their incontinence:—they had simply cheated themselves, was his position. Alas! like many a moralist, it doth not appear that his practice squared with his precept; though admitting all that is brought forward concerning his "amours," it would be unfair to charge him with great libertinism. To this reproach his amazing and unexampled literary production remains a sufficient answer. So good a judge of such matters as the famous George Sand seems to have taken him at his word, for she writes: "Moderate in every other respect, his life exhibited the purest morals, since he always dreaded licentiousness as the enemy of talent. He pursued chastity on principle, and his relations with the fair sex were those merely of curiosity."

This is contradicted by Balzac's sister, Laure,
[102]

BALZAC THE LOVER

who, with all her love for him, would not consent to any false touches in his portrait. "It is an error," she says, "to speak of his extreme moderation. He does not deserve this praise. Outside of his work, which was first and foremost, he loved and tasted all the pleasures of this world."

By the way, our hero was not physically attracted by George Sand, though he admired her talents in a qualified degree and esteemed her as *un bon camarade*. We find him explaining to Madame Hanska that she had no ground to be jealous of the author of "Indiana," and for once he was probably telling the whole truth. George Sand, in complimenting his virtue, perhaps took the woman's view that what was not for her was not for another.

The truth seems to be that Balzac was about as moral as the average Frenchman of his time, and though not a deliberate seeker of *bonnes fortunes*, his heroism fell short of putting aside those which came along, so to speak, in a proper way. Especially he was not averse to forming very intimate relations with ladies of quality. Aristocracy was indeed a lifelong bait to the little great man, and one can fancy him in the shades almost deploring

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

his immense renown because people *will* drop the “de” from his name—a nobiliary particle to which he had no legitimate title.

His first (recorded) love affair, with a Madame de Berny, helped to fix the aristocratic habit upon him to which he was inclined by his tastes and pretensions. He was then twenty-two and the lady was double his age, being the mother of nine children. Her husband was a man of noble lineage, and her father, a talented musician, had been in favour at the Court of Louis XVI. This affair probably saved him from some of the typical indiscretions of French youth, but for a *contra*, it undoubtedly stained his imagination:—the ghost of this maternal mistress rises in many of his pages devoted to the unsparing analysis of illicit passion. But it has a kinder and purer association with the heroine of the “Lily of the Valley,” in writing the description of whose affecting death-bed scene Balzac confesses that he was moved to tears.

Madame de Berny’s husband was living at the time of this *liaison*, which terminated, without rupture, through a failure of ardour on the young man’s side; it appears not that Monsieur de Berny

[104]

BALZAC THE LOVER

knew of the "romance." He was of the order of blind rather than complaisant husbands, and his wife is said to have taken a lover before Balzac. The Eighteenth century easiness of morals, especially in correct society, was not yet exhausted.

The *Dilecta* (Beloved), as Balzac called the mature lady of his affections, swayed him for a time by appealing to and fostering his literary ambition. She seems to have given him intelligent counsels for the most part, and to have "mothered" him, as we say in our English idiom. She improved his manners, which were boisterously self-assertive and to the end somewhat vulgar, and she unluckily confirmed him in those aristocratic notions and royalist politics which, in the eyes of a later generation, often go far toward spoiling his work and making the writer absurd. Balzac from the outset of his career leaned upon women, gave them much and expected still more in return. It is notable that all his favourite heroes follow suit:—women and money are the rulers of their destiny as of his own.

Madame de Berny, to repeat, had her share in the conception and ordering of the "Comedy." She aided him with her money in his first business

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

venture, which proved a failure, and thus laid the ply of that tendency of his to look to women for help, which more or less marked his whole after life. Finally, she was a good friend and a grateful mistress, and with the usual fatality that rules such affairs, she introduced Balzac to her successor in his affections—the Duchesse de Castries.

This was a high flight for a young man of twenty-five, without social or family titles (though he was now using the “de”), and who had as yet given no convincing proofs of talent, not to say genius. There is little room to doubt that the Duchesse became his very dear friend, but the story is mostly left to our imagination, as Balzac was chivalrously discreet in his *affaires de coeur*. The image of this noble dame is projected upon many a creation of Balzac’s. Their romance, however, is not given to us in its fulness, and it may not have overpassed the Platonic stage. Our hero could be discreet where the reputation of ladies of rank was concerned. But the Platonic reservation can hardly be made in regard to Madame Visconti (an Englishwoman, by the way) whom the author drew upon for his *Lady Dudley* in the “Lily of the Valley.” Balzac declared to the lady

[106]

BALZAC THE LOVER

whom he finally married that his friendship with the Visconti was a proper one. Posterity is inclined to believe that he perjured himself like a gentleman.

OUR HERO had reached the ripe age of thirty-two ere he unquestionably "arrived" with the "Physiology of Marriage" and "The Shagreen Skin"—books which, though not of his very best, fully justified the public reception of them. But even this first, long-awaited draught of the cordials of success did not satisfy Balzac; something else was lacking, and he confides to his sister that he despairs of ever being loved and understood by the woman of his dreams, or of ever finding her, save in his heart!

Like the old painter in his "Unknown Masterpiece," it was Balzac's fate to hunger vainly for his ideal woman to the end, and in the final moment of expected realization to grasp at a shadow!

But there were to be consolations for him, and perhaps the most enviable of these was his affair with "Maria," which belongs to 1833, Balzac being then in his thirty-fourth year. She was a delightful girl of middle class station who, as our

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

hero himself tells us, fell to him like a flower from heaven, exacted neither correspondence nor attentions, and made only the sweet condition: "Love me a year and I will love you all my life!"

Ah, Maria!—well had it been for the great man could he have contented himself with your unselfish affection; but then we should lack the tragedy of Honoré de Balzac.

It was fortunate for literature that Balzac met this charming girl just at the first full flowering of his genius, as in all but one respect she served as a model for *Eugénie Grandet*, the most popular and beloved of his female characters. The few lines of dedication prefixed to this masterpiece are inscribed "To Maria"; lovely and sincere is the tribute:

"Your portrait is the fairest ornament of this book, and here it is fitting that your name should be set, like the branch of box taken from some unknown garden to lie for a while in the holy water, and afterwards set by pious hands above the threshold, where the green spray, ever renewed, is a sacred talisman to ward off all evil from the house."

BALZAC THE LOVER

This genuine, if illicit, romance ran its brief course, and Maria had her wish; also—an incident which romantic persons will not like so well—she bore our hero a child. Then we hear no more of her in the great man's life-story. But the thought of her gentle love, her kind, unselfish tenderness remains to sweeten the story of that checkered life in which there was not to fall another such "flower from heaven." Ah, Maria! . . .

The conventional marriage in France is always a business arrangement, and it may be that the "accidents" of love are less ceremoniously regarded there than such things are among English-speaking races. At any rate, Balzac is allowed to have begotten four natural children (including Maria's daughter) as a result of his casual love passages. Their history is lost in the obscurity that usually envelops such unfortunates, and no explosions of the paternal genius have occurred to betray their identity to the French people.

Balzac had in his make-up no little of the dandy*—it was one of his superficial qualities

*Dickens, who presents some strong points of likeness to Balzac, both in his character and work, was also given to a loud style of dress and much jewelry. Henley calls him the "Almighty Swell."

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

which men like Oscar Wilde made a boast of imitating. There were periods when he seemed anxious to shine as a man of fashion (the dandyism of Byron was still a living tradition) and, despite his rather ungallant figure—he was in stature only five feet two inches, with a mighty head and the torso of Hercules—aimed at a foppish distinction of dress. We hear of his tailor, his jeweller and his goldsmith being lavishly levied upon to “exploit” this phase of the great man. Madame Delphine Gay wrote a book about his famous jewel-headed cane, which figures even more memorably in Danton’s comic statue of our hero. In his first flush of prosperity he set up a coach with a gigantic Jehu and (in the English fashion then reigning) a tiny groom whom he called “Millet-seed.” He loved to “derive” himself from noble ancestors and he made a dead set at the company of the well-born. His duchesses and countesses seemed as necessary to his existence as to his art, in which he constantly invoked them. In sum, I fear it must be allowed that our hero was a great deal of a snob, though he was not offensive in the English or Thackerayan degree, and this phase of character was not always preju-

BALZAC THE LOVER

dicial to his literary work. In certain of his creations his penchant for the "nobility" is splendidly justified.

This trait appeared even in the artist at work, but here it gives us only pleasure when we regard the sum and quality of his achievement; even as his boisterous egotism is similarly justified. He planned his living quarters with the same minute care that marks his description of the habitations of people in the "Comedy." Greatest care of all was shown in providing for his study—a real sanctum dedicate to the holy toil of creation. Perfect quietude was the first requisite—he seems to have dreaded noise as much as Carlyle. At his desk he wore a white Dominican gown with hood, adapting the material thereof for winter and summer. His feet were shod with embroidered slippers, and his waist was girt with a rich Venetian-gold chain ("All the elegance of life is about the waist," he writes somewhere), to which were suspended a pair of scissors, a paper-knife and a gold pen-knife, all beautifully carved. His living and working quarters—and this refers to his several homes—were always furnished in characteristic taste and usually at a cost that goes far

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

to explain his constant financial embarrassments. His regular habit was to go to bed at six o'clock in the evening and rise at midnight to his work; but whatever his working hours, he wrote by candlelight, heavy curtains always excluding the daylight from his study. When absorbed in the writing of a book, his isolation was more than monastic; he read no letters and received no callers, sometimes lengthening the creative effort during a stretch of eighteen hours. But the great toiler's claustration was not absolute even at such times, though he wished that the world might so believe: not infrequently it was broken by the visits of the Beloved. A secret door and staircase admitted her at the novelist's house in the Rue Cassini. Thus Balzac both lived and wrote his romances—a perilous duality of existence which few writers have attempted with success. In the case of Balzac it was to have a tragic conclusion that is without a rival in the creations of his art.

ENTER NOW *L'Étrangère* (The Stranger), the woman who was to dominate the rest of Balzac's life, that is to say, the greater part of his literary career. She was the Countess Evelina
[112]

BALZAC THE LOVER

Hanska, wife of a Polish nobleman living in the Ukraine. First attracted to Balzac by his studies of women, she sought to know him through a correspondence in which she for a time veiled her identity. The story of their relations culminating sixteen years afterward in marriage, is known to all readers of the novelist's Letters. He wrote to her almost daily for many years, pouring forth all his plans, struggles, hopes, ambitions with much of the fiery ardour which he gave to his creative work. She had borne four children to the husband who was twenty-five years her senior, but of these only one, a daughter, survived. Indifference toward her noble consort was a prime motive in drawing her to Balzac, and very early in their correspondence she permitted the latter to divine her real feelings. On the lovers first meeting in Switzerland, the Count showed himself as inconvenient as the husband is apt to be in such affairs. "Alas!" wrote Balzac to his sister—"he did not quit us during five days for a single second. He went from his wife's skirts to my waistcoat. And Neufchâtel is a small town where a woman, an illustrious foreigner, cannot take a step without being seen. Constraint doesn't suit me!"

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

He was transported with his new affinity and believed that he had found at last the woman of his dreams. "I am happy, very happy," he confesses to his dear Laure, the fond sister whose love condoned all his errors. "She is twenty-seven, has most beautiful black hair, the smooth and deliciously fine skin of brunettes, a lovely little hand, and is naïve and imprudent to the point of embracing me before every one. I say nothing about her great wealth. What is it in comparison with beauty? I am intoxicated with love!"

Such was the beginning of this celebrated romance, auspicious enough in spite of its illicit conditions, and bearing no hint of the tragic conclusion. But the close student of Balzac will be halted at once by this first reference to Madame Hanska's wealth. The reticence of the woman, and the loss or destruction of all her letters to Balzac (which she appears to have decreed herself), leave the story perplexed beyond hope of a final and authentic explanation. But there can be little doubt that the question of money, which constantly occupied the actual and imaginative existence of the novelist, furnishes the clue to the

[114]

BALZAC THE LOVER

catastrophe. The famous pair who had loved each other so long and so ardently, in spite of moral and legal hindrances, were not to find happiness in marriage. They had mutually deceived each other. Madame Hanska was less rich than she had allowed Balzac to believe and reckon upon; on the other hand, his debts were far heavier than he had confessed to her. Balzac was always incapable of strictly envisaging his financial position, as he habitually mistook the riches of his mind for available assets. Moreover, the flower of their youth was behind them and of their love as well, for the marriage of the church had nothing to give these lovers. They who have eaten their cake may not have it.

But they had loved well, and it is the romantic side of their story that we are concerned with. In spite of the husband's jealous vigilance they were able to correspond and even to meet at infrequent intervals; when the good man went off the job, some half-dozen years after their first meeting, there was no more restraint than the lady's social position demanded. Balzac now passed frequent holidays with her, and she visited him in Paris; one visit being attended by an accident* that

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

leaves no question of the extreme intimacy of their relations. It is true, however, that they had undergone a long Platonic probation, and to this Balzac alludes in a letter urging Madame Hanska to fix the date of their marriage. Writing to her on his birthday, he adds a prayer humorously addressed to his patron saint:

“O great Saint Honoré, thou to whom is dedicated a street in Paris at once so beautiful and so ugly . . . ordain that I may be no more a bachelor, by the decree of the mayor or the Consul of France; for thou knowest that I have been spiritually married for nigh on eleven years. These last fifteen years I have lived a martyr’s life. God sent me an angel in 1833. May this angel never quit me again till death! I have lived by my writing. Let me live a little by love! Take care of her rather than of me, for I would fain give her all, even to my portion in heaven. And especially, let us soon be happy. *Ave, Eva!*”

This was in 1843, and he had to wait seven years longer. All his biographers agree that the

* There is little doubt that Madame Hanska was prematurely confined at Balzac’s house in Passy, a suburb of Paris, August, 1845.

BALZAC THE LOVER

difficile, indeed somewhat perverse, coquetry of Madame Hanska on the marriage question, and the wearisome probation to which she subjected him, were potent factors in wrecking Balzac's health and causing his untimely death.

Beware the woman who tastes a malign pleasure in making you wait and stints the generosity of love; she is apt to be your fate and your undoing!

BALZAC has confessed that he could do nothing without the inspiration of female attachment:—to his famous dictum on chastity he added the permission to write love letters as forming an author's style! It is almost incredible how much he gave of himself in this way, while keeping up a rate of literary production that averaged four books for every year of his working life. He sought the sympathy of women as an aid to his work—as the spring which released the creative faculties and fructified his dreams. To Madame Hanska he avows—and we need not regard this as unmixed flattery: “The desire to see you makes me invent things that do not ordinarily come into my head. It's not only courage you give me to support the difficulties

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

of life; you give me also talent—at any rate, facility.”

His Eve was often jealous, owing to rumours that occasionally reached her from Paris, and she failed to attach due weight to his vaunted dogma of chastity, which he exploits in his letters, even to the prejudice of such a contemporary as Victor Hugo.* But she probably did not expect him to be a St. Anthony, from the conditions of his life and temperament, and she had brains enough to discern the value of the man who wrote such wonderful letters for her amusement. And then Balzac knew how to appease her wrath, if not to quiet her suspicions. He had the Frenchman's knack of humbling himself before the woman he desired to please, without any real self-derogation; and he could flatter his proud mistress in such lyrical terms as these:

“Adieu, loved friend, to whom I belong like the sound to the bell, the dog to his master, the artist to his ideal, prayer to God, pleasure to cause, colour to the painter, life to the sun. Love me,

* “Much of his (Hugo's) force, value and quality he has lost by the life he leads, having overdone his devotion to Venus.” Balzac to Madame Hanska.

BALZAC THE LOVER

for I need your affection, so vivifying, so agreeable, so celestial, so ideally good, of such sweet dominance, and so constantly vibrating!”

Balzac was united to his Eve in March, 1850. His health was now broken by his enormous literary labours, and the lady had been won tardily to give her consent; it is difficult not to believe that she foresaw the dissensions at hand. The bridegroom, however, was almost wild with delight, and he fancied that he had never known happiness before. “I have had no flowery spring,” he wrote to his friend, Madame Carraud, “but I shall have the most brilliant of summers, the mildest of autumns.”

Toward the end of May the wedded pair arrived in Paris (the marriage had taken place on the bride’s estate in Poland), and at evening drove to the fine mansion which Balzac had purchased and fitted up with splendid furniture, rare and costly works of art, etc. The house was dark, to their surprise and annoyance, and they had great trouble forcing an entrance with the aid of some strangers. A more painful shock awaited them:—the valet left in charge had gone mad, and was

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

discovered spilling the wine and wrecking the furniture. A portentous home-coming!

Ill in body and sick at heart, for he was already estranged from his wife, Balzac took to his bed of the malady which ended his life in August of that year (1850). The story of his pleading with the doctor for one year's grace of life in order that he might put the finishing touches to his literary testament—then for six months—six weeks—six days, and even six hours, may not be literally exact, but it persists as characteristic of the undaunted artist. The Countess remained in her apartments while he was dying alone, suffering terribly and much disfigured by dropsy; Victor Hugo, who called at the house and found the great man in his agony, has so witnessed. One is divided between pity for the giant stricken down in the midst of his creative labours and sorrow for the grim ending of the romance which had filled his heart during so many years. It seems such a tragedy as only he could have depicted.

The noble widow paid off Balzac's debts to the last centime and settled a comfortable annuity upon his mother. She vouchsafed no explanation of the estrangement and nothing on her part was

BALZAC THE LOVER

ever divulged. One is inclined to admire her proud silence, but to this hour the world blames her, mainly on the ground that after Balzac's death she took a lover in the artist, Jean Gigoux, who painted a well-known portrait of her. One studies the picture long, seeking to trace in the proud and noble beauty a clue to the soul of the woman who broke the heart of Balzac.

O Eve! O woman!—must thy destiny be always to betray? . . .

Balzac's widow survived him thirty years, dying in 1882. It must be set down to her credit that she wished to convert their fine house, the Hôtel de Beaujon, into a permanent memorial of the author, and began some necessary alterations with this end in view. On her death, however, the property was purchased by the Baroness Salomon de Rothschild, who demolished the house in order to incorporate the ground site with her own gardens. An ironic detail that will not fail to impress the attentive reader of Balzac. Money has the last word in his legend!

And voilà, a story after the Master's own heart. Is it not somewhere written in the "Comedy"?

TWO

BALZAC THE ARTIST

IN THE preceding paper critical questions would have been improper and were, therefore, avoided; but as we had much to say on Balzac's relations with women as influencing and colouring his art, I wish now to note his attitude toward his creations generally. And this the more that I believe an injustice is done him by the run of English critics who maintain that he has overstressed the evil in human nature and thereby flawed the integrity of his work. Even Mr. Saintsbury, who has done so much for the English understanding of Balzac, is not without qualms and doubts on this score; for the Englishman is a moralist before anything else, and yet he will not hesitate to judge a Frenchman to whom art was the supreme consideration!

I am of George Moore's opinion, that Balzac's achievement as a whole is scarcely inferior to any work of the human mind. I believe that in the
[122]

BALZAC THE ARTIST

creation of veritable human types, in the mastery of passion, synthetic grasp of life, and profound divination of motive, with the ability to exhibit these powers and faculties in a drama of compelling interest and original invention, which offers the unexpected turns of reality itself—Balzac has no equal among the novelists of the world.

To consider only our own literature and the giants thereof—Scott, Dickens and Thackeray—the fame of the first-named is so greatly diminished and his books are so generally neglected to-day that it seems needless to urge the comparison. Whatever be the merits of Scott's works—and no books were in their time more famous or more praised—they seem to lack the *principle of life* which keeps the world ever freshly interested in Balzac. As for Dickens or Thackeray, these great writers amuse us with their humour and satire, or touch us with pathos, or delight us with sketches of character, throughout their numerous productions. But will any competent critic pretend that in the stern business of reproducing life in its potential reality and passion in its hidden play—of making men and women whose destinies thrill us like those of people we have known, and even more,

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

for such art transcends our actual experience while borrowing its verity therefrom—will any good critic assert that the achievement of Balzac in this wise has been fairly matched by either Thackeray or Dickens? We do not expect that Taine, a Frenchman, would allow it, but even the thoroughly English Mr. Saintsbury forbears to make this claim. In point of strict, uncomplimentary fact, the work of the famous Englishmen named, as compared with that of Balzac, might be expressed in one of Dickens's titles, "The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices"; and this is said by one who is proud to call himself their lifelong lover and admirer! Neither of these admirable writers was dominated by the artistic idea in a degree at all comparable with Balzac, nor has either of them brought to the making of a novel anything like the amount of brains which the Frenchman put into his greater books. Please observe that I mean *brains*—intellectual and creative force rather than literary grace or merit of any sort palliative of artistic shortcoming or inability to hit the mark. Both Dickens and Thackeray are not seldom delightful in their conceded failures. What charming digressions in the "Philip," yes, even in the

[124]

BALZAC THE ARTIST

more formidable "Virginians," and where is Dickens more savourously himself than in parts of "Little Dorrit" and "Our Mutual Friend," both books that defy artistic classification?

The difference between the French master and these great English writers is mainly an artistic one. They have many fine qualities and literary merits, but strictly speaking, they never have a *story*—well, let us say, almost never. Dickens at least was on the way to achieving it. Was it indolence or incapacity or want of the artistic instinct that caused their failure? I cannot say, and the point may be indifferent to English readers, since Thackeray's style and Dickens's humour are readily accepted in lieu of a story. It is otherwise with Balzac, to whom creation and construction were all, who imposed a rule of artistic brevity upon himself, and thought out his novel completely before sketching the first chapter. Nearly always he has a good story and not seldom a great one—the mechanism of plot, the interplay of passion and all human motives merely regarded. Yet Balzac is not weak or inferior in other respects because of his cunning structure, his deep-laid architectonics. Each story is informed

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

with a vital thought and philosophy as necessary to it as air to the lungs. It is doubtful if any writer of fiction ever possessed the same capacity for abstract thought, united with a like power to reproduce the actual drama of life.

OSCAR WILDE remarked (after Baudelaire) that even the servants in Balzac's novels have genius, and it is true that his characters generally are by this trait unmatched in modern fiction; that is to say, their creator has charged them with his own force and fire. But while they possess this uncommon life, they are not all of a piece, so to say, but cunningly differentiated; no two of his rascals or honest folk, though of similar type, are the same in essence. Now as there are about two thousand *living* people in the "Comedy," the simple fact just stated establishes the immense creative power of Balzac.

There is yet another way of coming at the question of his supremacy, which idea (if the reader please !) is original with the present humble critic. When Balzac prepares a contest or an intrigue among his *people*, he arms both sides with such

[126]

BALZAC THE ARTIST

resources of talent and courage, of resolution and finesse, of check and countercheck, that the reader is transported as before a living drama. Perhaps the biggest novelist you can think of could take one side of a Balzacian situation or duel of this kind, but the effort would surely exhaust him. Alone the Master can handle both! Observe, I make the point that there is very much more than literature in the novels of Balzac. There have been some infertile stylists who thought they could re-write Balzac's books to their betterment, but literary graces are of small value compared to the creative content of the "Human Comedy." The man who carried a world in his brain may be indulged now and then in a slight lapse or obscurity—we have had to pardon a great deal more even to Shakespeare!

For my part I find every species of literary style and merit in Balzac, but the fiery fugue of his invention, the constant marvel of his divining genius always draws me from the form to the substance, even if I read him in French. To the giant labouring at the furnace of creation, to the great artist evoking and individualizing a vast multitude of souls and finding for them appropriate des-

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

tinies, the matter of literary form seemed less exigent no doubt than it did and does to writers whose "style" is all their capital. In art there is room for a Balzac as well as a Bourget, but we must not lose sight of the major values. Like Arthur Symons, I can say that Balzac's style seems always adequate to me—when the wonder of his creative power gives me leave to think of it. The question, however, is one of little or no significance to the English reader who can obtain our author in a good translation.

Something was said in the previous paper in regard to the working habits of Balzac, and especially as to the seclusion and quiet, the almost cloistral freedom from interruption and distraction with which he guarded his creative task. In this aspect no writer of whom we have knowledge interests us so much, for the reason that Balzac's labours were as heroic as his genius was undoubted. Now in the country, now in the heart of Paris he raised his Ivory Tower, cutting himself off from society in order to see it with the *x*-ray of imagination. He worked as if in a hallucination or creative trance, jealously limiting his hours of sleep, desisting only from

[128]

BALZAC THE ARTIST

complete exhaustion. At all times he seemed to be persuaded of the actual existence of his characters. To Jules Sandeau, speaking of his sister's illness, he replied with an apparent lack of feeling: "Let us come back to reality—let us talk of *Eugénie Grandet*."

This is proof, not of his selfishness (as has been asserted) but of his complete absorption in the imaginative world. The clairvoyant always dominated in Balzac, and herein I think is the supreme attraction of his work.

There have been men of great literary or artistic genius who were idle or reluctant or indifferent workers; the world is in the habit of making apology for them, feeling that they could have done better had they tried. Balzac never asked this kind of indulgence for himself and he would not hear of it for others. His immense interest for us lies in the fact that he was at once a great original genius and an amazing, almost unrivalled, worker.

Let us notice his own theories of work and inspiration; he has set them forth without reserve in "*Cousine Bette*," and as an artistic *credo* there is nothing to compare with them. This little manual

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

of Balzac's artistic faith and practice is contained within two or three pages—golden maxims to those who are capable of receiving and profiting by them. For the young artist and literary aspirant I take these counsels of Balzac to be the most valuable ever written; the words of a man for whom genius had done much, but who regarded the richest endowments of mind and spirit as worthless without constant labour and application. In truth, since his day, the world has had less patience than formerly with the gifted idler or *fainéant* in art, and it now demands production as the proof of genius.

To begin with, Courage is the word! according to Balzac. I summarize:

“Intellectual work, labour in the upper regions of mental effort, is one of the grandest achievements of man. That which deserves real glory in Art—for by Art we must understand every creation of the mind—is courage above all things, a sort of courage of which the vulgar have no conception.

“Perpetual work is the Law of Art, as it is the law of life, for Art is idealized creation. Hence great artists and poets wait neither for commis-

BALZAC THE ARTIST

sions nor purchasers. They are constantly creating—to-day, to-morrow, always. The result is the habit of work, the unfailing apprehension of the difficulties which keep them in close intercourse with the Muse and her productive forces. Canova lived in his studio, as Voltaire lived in his study; so must Homer and Phidias have lived.

“To nurse, to dream, to conceive of fine works is a delightful occupation—it is like smoking enchanted cigarettes. The work then floats in all the grace of infancy, in the wild joy of conception. . . . But gestation, fruition, the laborious rearing of the offspring, putting it to bed every night full fed with milk, embracing it anew every morning with the inexhaustible affection of a mother’s heart, licking it clean, dressing it a hundred times in the richest garb only to be instantly destroyed; then never to be cast down at the convulsions of this headlong life till the living masterpiece is perfected which in sculpture speaks to every eye, in literature to every intellect, in painting to every memory, in music to every heart! This is the task of execution.

“The habit of creativeness, the indefatigable love of motherhood which makes a mother—that miracle of nature which Raphael so well understood—the maternity of the brain, in short, so difficult to develop, is lost with prodigious ease.

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

“Inspiration is the opportunity of genius. She does not indeed dance on the razor’s edge; she is in the air and flies away with the swiftness of a crow; she wears no scarf by which the poet can clutch her; her hair is a flame; she vanishes like the lovely rose and the white flamingo—the sportsman’s despair.”

And hearken to this, O you writers and artists of little courage, who content yourselves with an elegant dilettanteism—you faint-hearted lovers who fear to come to close grips with the Muse!

“If the artist does not throw himself into his work as Curtius sprang into the gulf, as a soldier leads a forlorn hope without a moment’s thought, and if when he is in the crater he does not dig on as a miner does when the earth has fallen in on him; if he contemplates the difficulties before him instead of conquering them one by one, like the lovers in fairy tales, who to win their princesses overcome ever-new enchantments—the work remains incomplete; it perishes in the studio where creativeness becomes impossible, and the artist looks on at the suicide of his own talent.”

BALZAC THE ARTIST

THESE THEORIES are exemplified by the sculptor *Steinbock* ("Cousine Bette"), gifted, but without will or courage or persistence, who talked admirably about art and in the eyes of the world maintained his reputation as a great artist by his powers of conversation and criticism. Balzac calls such men "half-artists" and admits that they even seem superior to the true artists, who are taxed with conceit, selfishness, contempt for the laws of society. But he adds, great men are the slaves of their work.

In point of richness and fertility of ideas Balzac has no peer among writers of fiction; he pours them forth in all his books, and the stream rarely shows a falling off, but seems always at the full. This inexhaustible fecundity of thought is, I think, peculiar to him. True, it tempts him to many a digression which in such a writer, say, as Walter Scott, one would skip *sans* apology. But some of Balzac's richest ore is to be found in his excursions from the main theme. I need instance only the famous chapter on the occult sciences in "Cousin Pons," the episode of the brothers

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

Ruggieri in "Catherine de' Medici," and the matchless chronicle of Napoleon in the "Country Doctor." . . .

Was there ever a man so enormously interested in life—for whom no subject was too great or too small? Religion, politics, government, law, medicine, economics, mesmerism, astrology, second-sight, alchemy, criminology—this is to name but a few of the subjects he has touched, and memorably touched, in his books. Some of his penetrating thoughts have since his time fructified in the domain of occult science; the charlatanism of which he was accused by certain critics, on account of his interest in the "forbidden sciences" and his partiality for treating of these in his books, is now judged to have been a legitimate exercise of his great powers. It is true that some of his "pet notions" have been hardly dealt with since his day, and as a social prophet he failed to reckon sufficiently with forces that are now big with destiny in his own France. Balzac was in truth far from infallible—a genius constantly in eruption is bound to throw off much *scoriae* for which the world has no use. But that he is always pregnant, suggestive, interesting, who will deny, or that his

[134]

BALZAC THE ARTIST

idiosyncrasy makes up for his worst blunders and least attractive "manias"?

Of the debt which writers since his time have contracted toward Balzac, it is needless to say much; no worker in fiction has escaped his influence. He is the founder of the modern novel as he remains its greatest master; later writers have modified his methods, but all have learned from him and appropriated without scruple.

George Moore remarks that Maupassant merely cut him up into walking sticks! Daudet and others have made such use of the "Comedy" as their abilities or their limitations permitted; many a pretentious structure has been raised of materials borrowed from the Balzacian pyramid. Among English writers of high rank, Thackeray is his greatest debtor, having indeed learned of the French master some of the best lessons of his art. Even Dickens's debt is large, and it is worth noting that with more generosity than the author of "Vanity Fair," he has acknowledged the supremacy of Balzac. Coming down to our time, Robert Louis Stevenson was an unwearied student of Balzac and a cordial appreciator of his genius; Mr. Saintsbury allows that this ingenious and ad-

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

mired writer owed to Balzac some of his happiest conceptions. In fine, the great work of the Frenchman has been as a quarry to two generations of industrious artists—and artisans!

A SERIOUS charge against Balzac is that he has libelled human nature, representing its evil possibilities by types of character that are abhorrent to the general conscience and not justifiable by the canons of Art. In other words, it is held that Balzac has no right to introduce us to such people as *Hulot* and *Bette*, the *Marneffes*, *Philippe Bridau*, *Flore Brazier*, *et al.*: their depravity is overdrawn and, in any event, it is not fit for our eyes or nostrils. This, of course, is rather the English than the French position—(though it is not without a strong voicing in France, where the virtuous *bourgeoisie* know little more of our author than *Eugénie Grandet* and *Ursule Mirouet*). English sentiment requires a compromise in dealing with such specimens of human baseness and perversity, which was no part of Balzac's artistic method. His practice may have limited his popularity—it will always limit his acceptance among English readers—but it affirms his greatness as

[136]

BALZAC THE ARTIST

a master painter of life. His own words on this point are memorable. When his sister remonstrated with him in regard to his evil characters, urging him to modify them or turn them to better courses, he replied: "They can't change, my dear. They are fathomers of abysses; but they will be able to guide others. The wisest persons are not always the best pilots. It's not my fault. I haven't invented human nature. I observe it, in past and present; and I try to depict it as it is. Impostures in this kind persuade no one."

Again, if during the serial publication of a story he were entreated to save some guilty one or black sheep among his creations—the sentimental public being much given to such appeals—he would exclaim: "Don't bother me. Truth above all. Those people have no backbone. What happens to them is inevitable. So much the worse for them!"

This is somewhat different from the legend which represents Dickens as letting the sentimental public decide the fate of his characters.

"Cousine Bette" is a noxious dose even for the fanatic Balzacian, and in truth this book lacks moral beauty to a point of being almost pathological—on first reading it, I thought myself wander-

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

ing through the streets of Hell! Nevertheless, the art of the book is as great as it is terrible, and Mr. Saintsbury is one English critic who concedes the fact, ranking it with the greatest parts of the "Comedy." No doubt it is his English patriotism which inclines him to prefer *Becky Sharp* to *Valérie Marneffe*, but we need not forget that the latter "flower of evil" has even a more doughty champion in Taine. *Valérie* is in truth one of the most finished characters of Balzac; she may be less "respectable," but she is fully as convincing as *Becky*, though not, of course, equally acceptable from an English point of view. Does Balzac realize his wicked heroine more intensely, favoured to this end, as he was, by the greater license accorded him? I am not sure, but I fancy she stays with us longer. *Hulot* always went back to her (nobody ever left her, she naïvely said), and so does the fit reader enamoured of the great creations of art.

As for *Bette* herself, she is without a rival in Balzac or elsewhere—the perfect culmination of his studies in female wickedness, the Black Pearl that he drew from his profound and laboured alchemy of souls. There are but few characters in

[138]

BALZAC THE ARTIST

fiction so vividly and terribly realized that we never lose the fear which the mere sight of the printed page where they have their life imparts; and of these is the incomparable *Bette*. But indeed her quality is such that it cannot be suggested in a few lines of description. I always go back to the book in order to further probe her secret, and after many readings I have not yet found it. Like *Iago*, she seems in her villainy without adequate motive, but with this difference, that we feel she is justified according to her terrible inner code and the workings of her dark nature. The chronicle of her goings and comings, her plots and counterplots, her sleepless pursuit of vengeance nourished by a savage virginity, is all of the very stuff of Balzac's power. Her death amid the sincere grief of the unsuspecting victims of her fury and hatred—hating and seeking to injure them to her latest breath—is a thing made credible only by the force of the genius which depicts it. She remains perhaps the chief enigma and the supreme triumph of Balzac's art.

Mr. Saintsbury perceives the full beauty of *Lisbeth* (which is much for an Englishman), but excellent critic as he is, I cannot follow him where

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

he appears to doubt whether Balzac has made the most of *Hulot's* vice, and even ventures to remark that he was not happy in treating this "particular deadly sin." I wonder where Mr. Saintsbury would direct us for more competent treatment! So much depends upon *Hulot*, the blind unconscious tragedian of the piece, that if he be a failure the work cannot be called great. But Mr. Saintsbury ranks it with the author's very greatest work! Something wrong here undoubtedly.

I GRANT that *Hulot* is "rather disgusting" and a "wholly idiotic old fribble," especially toward the end of his bad courses; his creator so depicted him with deliberate intent. But take him for all in all, from the time when he was still "handsome Hector," in his hearty, libidinous middle age—to the latest glimpse of him in his ever-prurient senility, and I maintain that the *Baron Hulot d'Ervy* ranks with the most successful figures of the "Comedy," or if you please, of the literature of fiction. He is drawn with a certainty of touch which leaves no doubt of his reality. Where in literature do we find such another picture of the libertine sacrificing all that men hold dear and

[140]

BALZAC THE ARTIST

sacred to the vile master passion that consumes him, body and soul? The picture of *Hulot* in his final stage of depravity, when he had sunk to cretinism and the last dregs of sensuality, indifferent to the death of his wife whose virtues he acknowledged and whom in his careless way he had loved—is as great a thing as you shall find in Balzac, repellent as it may be to English susceptibilities. The moral, too, is fearfully convincing; it makes you believe in God, the Devil, and Balzac!

The writers who have accused Balzac of libelling human nature in such characters as *Hulot* have failed to make out their case.

To George Sand, who had protested against certain characterizations in this book (and they will always be objected to, since they are beyond the pale of conventional treatment), the author thus justified his method:

“You seek to paint man as he ought to be. I take him as he is. Believe me, we are both right. I am fond of exceptional beings. I am one myself. Moreover, I need them to give relief to my common characters, and I never sacrifice them without necessity.”

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

In this connection it is interesting to recall that Balzac's "Père Goriot," perhaps the most powerful novel of the Nineteenth century, was long attacked as immoral. His books, or many of them, are on the Catholic Index as taboo to the faithful, though he was, by profession at least, attached to Royalism and the Church; and though he wrote "Jesus Christ in Flanders." Henley, liberal critic and admirer of Balzac as he was, did not scruple to accuse the author of a leaning toward Sadism, for which he claimed to have found warrant in certain parts of the "Comedy." After this one is relieved to find that the noble Lamartine, who had full opportunity of knowing Balzac, pronounced him a good man—one indeed whose conscience had a peculiar repulsion from evil.

The risk incurred in attempting to deduce a writer's moral bias or personal character from his literary creations has not seldom been pointed out, but it will always attract a certain type of critic.

It sometimes happens upon the disclosure of a crime or scandal peculiarly shocking—like a plague spot suddenly uncovered in the community—that people will exclaim against it as incredible, as if to compliment human nature or indemnify the

BALZAC THE ARTIST

cause of morality in general. They do not wish to admit the possibility of such deeds, the existence of such malefactors; as judging the admission itself to be a criminal offence. This seems to fairly represent the attitude of certain—mostly English—critics on the question before us. They refuse to allow that the human character can be as bad as Balzac depicts it, and even if so, it ought not to be described at all! In a word, there is no validity in the critical objection to Balzac's treatment of evil in his novels (whatever religious casuistry might make of it). The question, as we have seen, did not trouble our author. In his own phrase, he did not invent human nature or the evil thereof—he observed it and described it as a necessary element of his great task—the history of a complete society. We may allow that Balzac's divinatorial genius urged him to sound the uttermost depths of human wickedness—the farthest reaches of the lawless will. But one should be as gifted as the author of the “Human Comedy” himself to determine the question whether it sometimes led him astray or falsified his picture of life.

To conclude: The world created by Balzac in his “Human Comedy” has places to suit tastes the

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

most diverse, and one can move on until he finds a scene to his liking. I know not if it be true, as some English critics contend, that Balzac has portrayed the evil that is in human nature more convincingly than the good; at any rate, the question cannot be allowed to impeach his art. Frenchmen like Taine make no difficulty of accepting the "Comedy" on this score.

In my view, there is within the wide compass of this world of Balzac's creation many a haunted spot, many a wondrous enthralling region where the light of genius dwells in such heart-troubling power and beauty as may be found only in the work of a very few writers, and these the great masters of the literary art.

THREE

THE FORTUNATE HOAX OF PAGAN WASTENEYS

SEVERAL YEARS ago there came out in a well-known American magazine a little story entitled "The Death of the Poet," which pleased many with its fantastic humour and quaint ironic pathos, and for sundry other reasons especially delighted the relative few who deemed themselves privileged to read between the lines. It was manifestly the fortunate, if somewhat perverse, conceit of a poet railing at a destiny which, with all its gifts, had failed to satisfy him. Moreover, the prose envelope of this delicate fantasy was wrought in a graceful and finished style, rarely met with in the current of contemporary literature; and this, with the novelty of the theme, procured it more than a cursory notice from our select reading public.

The story purported to set forth a last and extraordinary scene in the life of Pagan Wasteneys, an English poet of æsthetic and paradoxical tend-

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

encies. Feeling that he has not long to live, though still under forty, and finding himself so bored with life that he can look forward to the end without regret, the poet, unlike Oscar Wilde, heroically resolves not to "die beyond his means." Accordingly, he lashes himself up to a fury of literary production and thereby is enabled to satisfy the claims of his creditors before dying. A numerous company, they are summoned to his bedside to receive that which, presumably, they had often vainly sought at his hands. All are paid off in new-minted gold sovereigns, beautiful as the poet's own rhymes which, alas, the world had not been always willing to accept as legal tender. A man of law, the poet's trusted friend, attends to the audit, while Mr. Wasteney from his couch looks on, languidly elate. Each tradesman is given something over and above the amount legally due him—perhaps as a gentle rebuke for past importunities. Then the awed creditors withdraw and the poet has a last interview with his wife and two young daughters, in which he bears himself with remarkable *sangfroid*—no tears being shed save those of fantasy. Finally, the poet orders that his books be brought in—a rather staggering

[146]

PAGAN WASTENEYS

total of them—and laid at the foot of his bed. He passes his long white hands over them lovingly, and requests his faithful friend, the man of law, to read to him certain of the poems. This is done to the satisfaction of everybody (the reader of the tale included); after which the poet saluting his books (fifty-three in number) as his *real* children, calmly composes himself to die. Thus ends the little story.

I APOLOGIZE to Mr. Pagan Wasteneys—pardon!—I should say Mr. Richard Le Gallienne—for taking these crude liberties with his charming invention (the curious reader will find it, with much else of like appetizing quality, in the volume entitled “Dinners with the Sphinx”).

My only excuse is that I had not fallen had he not proved himself so cunning a tempter. And while praising the art of his clever hoax, with its undercurrent of serious irony, I congratulate him at the same time that the obituary was premature. For had Pagan Wasteneys, *alias* Richard Le Gallienne, passed out along about 1905, I suspect he would not fill so large and commanding a niche in the Temple of Fame as seems now assured to

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

him. Surely it is better that a poet should live on to give his best to the world than that a parcel of miserable debts should be paid at such a costly sacrifice. This, I take it, is the meaning of Mr. Le Gallienne's apologue of the poet and his creditors. A fable, too, that was not without its justifying truth, for in spite of all the cruel and stupid comedy that has gathered about the subject—the horse-collar wit of generations of dullards—poets are rather more apt than plumbers to suffer and die of their debts!

Happily for literature, the poet in this instance did not die, and so we have his latest gift to the world, "The Lonely Dancer,"—a book which discloses higher powers than any previous work of his and ranks him with a very small group of the first poets of the age. Yet to those who have long known and loved Le Gallienne's art, this book will seem to mark no abrupt transition from cleverness to mastery, but merely a deepening of the note and a perfecting of the music which announce the full maturity of the artist. And they will justly point you that in his "Hafiz," which takes us back over a decade, Richard achieved a work, lacking indeed the *réclame* of

[148]

PAGAN WASTENEYS

Fitzgerald's "Omar," but surpassing it in poetic craftsmanship, in tender and versatile fancy,—above all, in such a blending and marrying of his own inspiration with that of his Oriental prototype, as has yielded a masterpiece of English verse, not merely or substantively what is called a poet's translation. These friendly advocates of our poet will cite you the great love lyric beginning,

"The days of distance and the nights apart,"

as worthy to be added to the imperishable litany of passion; and indeed it is not easy to deny them.

The poetical talent of Mr. Le Gallienne was early manifested, and in truth his precocity was such as to raise a fear that he would not go the distance. Charming as his *juvenilia* were, there was that in the young poet's work which might well have given his literary sponsors even greater concern. I allude to its extreme facility, which in turn was conditioned at times by a superficial prettiness and sentimentalism. Emerson says that the poet must bleed, but in those young days, Richard shed no blood save that of the rose of pleasure. On this account chiefly, a severe criti-

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

cism long denied virility to Le Gallienne's verse, and (according to the fixed custom of critics) in order to prove its case, did him a considerable injustice. There never was a time since he first appeared with his "Book-Bills of Narcissus," when Richard could not, if he so elected, write like a true poet.

But it might not well be gainsaid even by those who cherished his talent, that in his curled youth, like Hylas on his errand to the fountain, Richard played and loitered too much by the way. Youth is a sweet thing, to be sure, but even a poet must not overstay his time in certain phases of juvenility. I suspect, too, that Richard's light-o'-loves, of which he has had rather more than a fair allowance, have not served him well with the stern wardens of literature, and perhaps have taken from him more than they gave. It is very interesting, but highly perilous, to both live and write your romances: which rightly or wrongly, has been imputed to our poet. A too great preoccupation with mere Girl, and a certain rather effeminate cult of beauty, have in the past told against a full acceptance of Mr. Le Gallienne.

But there is, fortunately, little trace of the faults
[150]

PAGAN WASTENEYS

just alluded to in the latest book we owe to the fertile genius of this poet. His merits, as I have said, appear in a heightened valuation, compelling a new appraisal of the man and his work. Evidently Richard is of those hardy perennials who go on to more than justify the tender promise of their first flowering. This book gives us a wiser and maturer Richard—sadder, too, doubtless, but the more lovable for that, quaintly as he sometimes copies the accent of Ecclesiastes. But he has achieved true pathos at last, and with it the full estate of the poet. I find his latest work redolent throughout of the sap and savour of the English poetical genius that was yesterday vocal in Keats and Shelley, and to-day “warbles its wood-notes wild” through Richard Le Gallienne.

IT IS not to be questioned that the reading public in general have an aversion to poetry, mainly because, though the most difficult form of writing, it is yet the most commonly attempted by fools. Palliate the fact as we may, there is the testimony of the bookstalls to confirm it, and not less significant is the attitude of publishers, who are notoriously reluctant to bring out verse, unless at the

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

author's proper expense—and mark you, Cerberus is not always to be so baited. That the public knows what it wants and that it does not want poetry (save in exceptional cases) is a broad sailing regulation in the publishing trade. It probably harks back to the resolution of the famous English house of John Murray, in the third quarter of the last century, to publish no more poetry. The fact is that the English reading world had been long overdone with feeble and abortive imitations of Byron, Moore, Scott and a few other pre-Victorians, which caused a public revulsion that has lasted unto our day. The world would never turn from good poetry, but the sickness produced by bad poetry is of a kind hard to overcome.

Here, then, is one very practical reason why it is so difficult to be a poet nowadays: whatever be the value of the gift he brings, he is only too apt to find the gates barred against him. That a poet should expect to live by his verse seems to us as hazardous an adventure and as comic a notion as it was in Grub Street days. I do not think the miracle has been performed in our time, though a fat purse may be occasionally lifted on the shady

PAGAN WASTENEYS

slopes of Parnassus. To live by poetry is in truth a dreadful trade, like gathering samphire on Dover cliff; and hence, no doubt, the many volumes of Mr. Le Gallienne's prose.

For all that, mind you, poetry will continue to be written so long as Love and Beauty rule the hearts of men: and the poet with the true stuff in him will never fail to charm away those frowning gates with the challenge of his song.

I need not descant upon the peculiar merits and qualities of Mr. Le Gallienne's work, rated as it is in literary estimation, but I should be unhappy if my readers did not enjoy to the full with me the poem, "To a Bird at Dawn," in Mr. Le Gallienne's latest volume. To my mind, it is the highest and purest lyric cry that has been heard for many years in English poetry, and may well send us questing back to Keats or Shelley for a like strain of artistic excellence and austere beauty. This poem authenticates the *sacer vates* in Mr. Le Gallienne as no previous song of his has been able to do, and raises him to an unchallengeable primacy among the living English choir.

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

I WANT to say a word on the "style" of Mr. Le Gallienne's poetry, as distinguished from its content. People commonly think of style as applied to prose, and all poetry, perhaps with more or less reason, looks the same to them. But our poet's style is the first to be noted of his distinctions, marking his work most clearly and unmistakably as of the best English tradition. It has the seal of intellect and race. In a word, it is a pure and genuine poetic style, for the like of which you will search long among contemporary makers of verse. One effect of this exquisite distinction lies in the fact that you can never fancy Mr. Le Gallienne's poetry being disarticulated *as prose*—a thing which, absurdly enough, is often suggested in reading even the more pretentious verse of our time. Form and thought are indivisible in the work of this poet—a significant proof of his superiority.

The poem referred to is a quite flawless specimen of Mr. Le Gallienne's poetic style. There are many pieces in the same delightful volume that come little short of it in point of true inspiration and distinction of form. This article is already
[154]

PAGAN WASTENEYS

exceeding bounds, but I cannot forbear quoting, as illustrative of the views here expressed of Mr. Le Gallienne's poetry, the following extract from that most unusual nature poem which he has called "Alma Venus":

*Beyond the heaving glitter of the floe,
The free blue water sparkles to the sky,
Losing itself in brightness; to and fro
Long bands of mist trail luminously by.
And, as behind a screen, on the sea's rim
Hid softnesses of sunshine come and go,
And shadowy coasts in sudden glory swim!—
O land made out of distance and desire!—
With ports of mystic pearl and crests of fire.*

*Thence, somewhere in the spaces of the sea,
Travelled this halcyon breath presaging Spring;
Over the water even now secretly
She maketh ready in her hands to bring
Blossom and blade and wing;
And soon the wave shall ripple with her feet,
And her wild hair be blown about the skies,
And with her bosom all the world grow sweet,
And blue with the sea-blue of her deep eyes,
The meadow, like another sea, shall flower,
And all the earth be song and singing shower;*

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

*While watching, in some hollow of the grass
By the sea's edge, I may behold her stand,
With rosy feet, upon the yellow sand,
Pause in a dream, and to the woodland pass.*

This also, from the "Country Gods"—which is, besides, remarkable for sounding a deep and virile note that has seldom, if ever, been credited to our poet, is nobly to the same purpose. It will remind the classically founded reader of more than one poem of Horace's, but there is no conscious imitation and the chief point of resemblance is that it enforces, with scarcely less poetic charm, a kindred philosophy. True poets, you see, are always contemporaries:—that is an advantage of being immortal!

*I dwell with all things great and fair:
The green earth and the lustral air,
The sacred spaces of the sea,
Day in, day out, companion me.
Pure-faced, pure-thoughted folk are mine
With whom to sit and laugh and dine;
In every sunlit room is heard
Love singing, like an April bird,
And everywhere the moonlit eyes
Of beauty guard our paradise;*

PAGAN WASTENEYS

*While, at the ending of the day,
To the kind country gods we pray,
And dues of our fair living pay.*

*Ah! then how good my life I know,
How good it is each day to go
Where the great voices call, and where
The eternal rhythms flow and flow.
In that august companionship,
The subtle poisoned words that drip,
With guileless guile, from friendly lip,
The lie that flits from ear to ear
Ye shall not speak, ye shall not hear;
Nor shall you fear your heart to say,
Lest he who listens shall betray.
The man who hearkens all day long
To the sea's cosmic-thoughted song
Comes with purged ears to lesser speech,
And something of the skyey reach
Greatens the gaze that feeds on space;
The starlight writes upon his face
That bathes in starlight, and the morn
Chrisoms with dew, when day is born,
The eyes that drink the holy light
Welling from the deep springs of night.*

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

I HAVE said that Mr. Le Gallienne has at length achieved true pathos, which to a singer of his joyous and hedonistic impulse naturally came a little late in the day's account. There are not a few tokens throughout this book that our poet has served his novitiate of sorrow, but nothing more unaffectedly touching than the following simple verses without a title.

*Who was it swept against my door just now,
With rustling robes like Autumn's—was it thou?
Ah, would it were thy gown against my door—
Only thy gown once more.*

*Sometimes the snow, sometimes the fluttering
breath
Of April, as toward May she wandereth,
Make me a moment think that it is thou—
But yet it is not thou!*

I now put this tantalizing book out of hand so that I may not be tempted to quote at further length—there is especially “Flos Aevorum,” itself a perfect flower of art and poesy; and “The Mystic Friends,” wherein the voices of Wind and Rain and Sea are rendered in a noble diapason; and not a few others that challenge me to pay
[158]

PAGAN WASTENEYS

with grateful words something of the debt I owe them.

For this poet is a bringer of gifts—*poeta ferens dona*—and especially he brings happiness, that sovereign gift without which all his charming were in vain. These poems are tremulous with a summons of joy that opens all hearts, and yet plangent with that sweet pain of sorrow “remembering happier things,” which is equally a necessity of our strangely compounded clay. I can hardly think of a living poet who is better able to serve us in this dual wise than Richard Le Gallienne.

Therefore, I conclude as I began,—and now I trust with the reader’s pleased concurrence,—that Poetry has reason to be glad she was not bidden to the actual funeral of Mr. Pagan Waste-neys, or following the Horatian image, called upon to moisten the ashes of her friend the poet with an indebted tear. Be it many a year ere the cypress shall mingle in her garland for him whose just praise is now voiced by the silver trumpets of fame!

FOUR

THE MAID AGAIN

MARK TWAIN, who loved Joan of Arc and found in her wonderful career the inspiration of his most artistic book, perhaps his masterpiece, writing to me a half-dozen years ago, said:

“I was hoping that they (the Church) would not canonize her. We do not raise monuments to Adam: he is a monument himself.”

In point of strict fact, Joan has not been canonized: she has been *beatified*—which is canonically a different thing, though the difference will not seem important to those of other faiths. The Maid, then, is honoured with the appellation of Blessed, but she is not called a Saint, which would entitle her to receive, in her character of heavenly intercessor, the prayers of the faithful.

Catholics, therefore, must not pray to her as they do or may to other recognized Saints. In France, especially since the war began that has

THE MAID AGAIN

so tried the patience and courage of the people, they have shown a disposition to ignore this theologic distinction and to prefer Joan beyond all the Saints of the calendar. And truly one might not blame the poor people in this dark hour for thinking above all of *cette bonne Jeanne d'Arc* who was of their common blood and who showed right gallantly that she knew how to help them. Hence in one diocese the Bishop ordered her effigy to be removed from the churches, as the people insisted upon praying to it, although the head was without the nimbus or circle of rays which indicates the plenary degree of saintship. This action of the holy man was roundly criticised (Joan never was lucky with Bishops!) and indeed, viewing all the circumstances, it may well have left him liable to the charge of *lèse-patriotisme*.

A clever French writer, M. Jean de Bonnefon, has composed a double Invocation to the Maid with a view, as he professes, to satisfying both Catholics and non-believers and rallying all parties under her standard. I translate the laic Prayer or "éloge" which appeared not long ago in the "Mercure de France."

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

GLORY TO Joan of Arc! daughter of the people, truly and proudly a heretic, betrayed by her King, sold by the nobles, martyred by the priests.

Glory to Joan of Arc! condemned at Rouen by the whole Roman Church, by the Cardinal of Winchester and by the Bishop of Beauvais, by the Vicar of the Inquisition representing the Holy See, by the official theologians of the Faculty of Paris, by the priests and monks of every order.

Glory to Joan of Arc! whose King had her trial revised eighteen years after the murder at Rouen, not to rehabilitate the fame of her who had saved France, but only to prove that he, the King, had not employed a creature of the Devil.

Glory to Joan of Arc! terrible to the enemies of France, rebellious to the theologians of Rome, inspirer of the new patriotism, adversary of religious intolerance.

Glory to Joan of Arc! forgotten so long as lasted the power of Kings whose throne she had saved: glorified by the French people as soon as they had learned liberty from the Revolution.

Joan triumphant belongs to France; Joan the
[162]

THE MAID AGAIN

martyr belongs to the Revolution and to free thought.

Joan, the first and most beautiful example of heroic womanhood, is also the finest example of what human ferocity can do, in lies, in calumnies and in tortures.

Joan created in the Fifteenth century two laic novelties: the cult of the fatherland as against the international cult of religion; the right to liberty of conscience, affirmed before her judges and executioners.

Joan of Arc believed in God and despised the Church. Proofs:

To the women who asked her to touch some objects in order to bless them, she replied: "Touch them yourselves; that will be just as good."

In the time of Joan of Arc there were three Popes at once. Armagnac asked the Virgin Warrior to point out the true one. "I will tell you," she said, laughing, "as soon as the English give me time to breathe."

Before the assembly of Poitiers Joan made fun of a Dominican who asked her in a terrified tone, "What language do your Voices speak!"

"A better language than yours."

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

“Remember,” said a learned Doctor, “that you are before the theologians who have studied all books.”

“God has a book,” answered Joan, “where no priest has ever read.”

Never spoke Joan in the name of the Pope, in the name of the Church. She admitted no human intermediary between her and heaven.

At Rouën she said to the Bishops: “There is more in the books of God than in yours!”

“Are you willing to submit yourself to the Pope?” cried the inquisitor.

“Take me before him and I will make answer to him,” replied the proud daughter of the people.

Conclusion:

The Church dared not beatify Joan as a martyr, for she was the Martyr of the One Church!

The first sentence of Rouen said: “Joan of Arc is cut off from the Church like an infected member and delivered to the secular arm.”

Glory to Joan of Arc! the first free believer of the beautiful country of France, saved from calumny and hate by the people. The head of Joan of Arc needs no gilded nimbus: her true altar, laic and French, is the Catholic death-fire of
[164]

THE MAID AGAIN

Rouen whose fierce flame illumines the immortality of her superb forehead!

The orthodox Prayer by the same hand, though not so long, is apparently as fervent and sincere, while it states the position of the Church without weakness or undue apology. (Unlike the torturing of Galileo which remains in some doubt, the trial and punishment of Joan, public, extraordinary, minutely attested, cannot be palliated or quibbled away.) I have not left myself room for this "éloge" in its entirety, but I give the better and greater part of it. This Invocation is less militant and striking than the previous one, and naturally so; but as I have said, the writer seems to deal fairly as between the two altars, and it cannot be urged that he brings more incense to the one than to the other. Copying his impartiality, I offer the following version:

Joan of Arc had received a mission—to deliver France from the yoke of the stranger.

She was the sword and the buckler of God committed to the service of France.

France can be saved by her memory as she was saved by her heroic deeds.

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

Without divine intervention it is impossible to explain how a seventeen-year-old child, an innocent daughter of the fields, knowing only the catechism, familiar only with the labours of a small farm, could become the leader of an army, dragging Victory behind her!

Joan is the single human figure who unites at the same time, in a sublime ideal, the warrior and the saint, the heroine and the martyr, the invincible archangel with the sword and the innocent virgin adorned only with her virtue.

She offers the most illustrious example of what human weakness is capable when it becomes the docile instrument of Divine Omnipotence. She was always careful, at the summit of glory as in the depths of her dungeon, to perform with a scrupulous fidelity the duties of the most fervent piety.

To condemn the Church for having tortured Joan of Arc is, with bad faith, to confound the errors of some men of the Church, who pass, with the rôle of the Church, which remains. It is the Church which has rehabilitated Joan of Arc, which has created her popularity. It is the Pope of Rome who has desired to confer upon her the

[166]

THE MAID AGAIN

greatest honour within his power—that of the altars.

During her trial she ceased not to appeal to the Pope, and she demanded to be brought before the Bishop of Rome in order that she might justify herself.

On the death-pile, as the fire mounted, she begged Martin Ladvenu to hold the cross high-raised, so that she might see the Sign of God until the last second above the flames.

The Church in beatifying Joan of Arc has torn aside the veils which error had cast upon a holy figure.

THESE TWO invocations seem to me to represent something more than a literary *tour de force* or a proof of French versatility: there is in truth a deeper lesson behind them. Joan of Arc remains one of the few dominant figures of history—in certain respects of character and conduct she approaches the Nazarene himself! Her story parallels His in the obscurity of her birth and early life, and in the supreme points of the Mission, the Betrayal and the Sacrifice. Also she resembles the Great Martyr in her eternal destiny; like Him

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

she has been as a sword flung into the world. She is still under trial, in spite of the tardy Beatification—a partial surrender of the Church whose ministers charged themselves with her death. Alone among the victims of mediæval darkness, cruelty and intolerance, she has been able to compel from the distance of five centuries this measure of justice and vindication. But it is not enough!—still her quarrel proceeds,—her white banner flutters in the van of the eternal conflict—and not yet has she lost her old wondrous power to summon the brave and the chivalrous to her defence. Strip every vestige of the supernatural from her legend*—and still she remains a marvel and an enigma to all time, as she is the choicest glory of the fair land of France which she redeemed at the price of her blood. In truth one feels in such an hour as the present that the Maid has come to personify France herself!—Beyond that Glory has nothing to give.

* Voltaire found that it could not be degraded even by such powers of satire and mockery as he possessed. And his “*La Pucelle*” remains a witness to his everlasting disgrace. Anatole France has fared no better in his laboured attempt to belittle, if not actually to scandalize, the Maid.

FIVE

OUR BEST-LOVED POET

IT IS a very ancient, and surely a gracious belief, still held by the elect few, that poets do not grow old of the spirit: their bodily part may comply with the universal law of decay, but the soul of the poet shares, by some decree of the stars, in the eternal youth of his song.

This is only to say that the true poet is Divine, god-like, participating in the immanent and imperishable Essence of life. Such at least was the faith of the wise ancients—so much wiser than we as to many high things. Be sure that when Horace talked of turning into a bird and predicted his immortality, there was nobody to jeer in Rome.

There is in our land to-day, growing old gracefully as to the body but ever younger of the spirit, one whom I have heretofore called our best-loved Poet.* I doubt if a single intelligent voice the

*Mr. Riley died in July, 1916.

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

whole country over would deny him this merited title and distinction. His mere name has grace to summon an impulse of love and gratitude to the lips of thousands, such as I believe no other American poet has ever been able to command. In his own home State of Indiana this feeling rises to a sort of idolatry—and very proper it is! Literature in our time has not been more significantly honoured than when James Whitcomb Riley's birthday was made a Holiday for the school-children of Indiana. No poet has ever lived or warbled or wrote or sung to whom childhood owes so much which maturity is so glad to pay! In this province alone he has had no end of imitators, but scarcely a single worthy rival.

No writer of our time has won to the hearts of the plain people with anything like the success of Riley. He had mastered the secret of Dickens, who, by the way, was a lifelong source of inspiration to him;—he early found and always kept open the way to the popular heart. His fresh and versatile genius worked upon the old human themes, yet ever new to each generation, with unflagging charm, and sympathy, and inspiration. Fortunately, he did not have that surfeit of academic

OUR BEST-LOVED POET

culture which kills off the poet and produces the pedant. Largely self-taught, like his master Dickens, his best literary capital to begin was his immense zest of life, and his touch with all common joys and sorrows. I am glad that he did not bother to learn Latin, for had he done so he would not have written "The Old Swimmin' Hole." He left the plucking of rare and difficult laurels to others, content for himself to write the Plain-song of the American people, and especially of his own "home folks" of Indiana. In so electing he "builded better than he knew," or perhaps obeyed a profound suggestion of his Destiny.

Life, far more than literature, was Riley's material; the light he gives is of the very sun of life, not a pale reflection caught from literary mirrors. These half-dozen volumes of his are bursting with joyous life and quaint humour and native wit and many an untaught felicity,—aye, and there are not lacking songs as high and pure, lyrics of as consummate an art as may be placed to the credit of any American poet. This is not to apologize for Riley's work in dialect:—he is an artist in that not less than in his more conventional efforts.

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

There is a kind of literary art, and a very perdurable kind, which must first be parochial in order to become universal. Its apparently artless form and simple content commend it at first to the unlearned and uncritical; it is warmed and cherished in the hearts of the common people ere it be given to or accepted by the polite literary world. Of this order was the poetry of Robert Burns, and to it belongs a great part of the work of James Whitcomb Riley. However, it must be allowed that, setting aside the question of dialect, Riley is a better poet in regular English than his famous brother of the thistle. Natural as was his impulse to sing, and easy as seemed his triumphs in dialect verse, the American strove all his life for artistry. I believe he was a greater and finer artist than is generally recognized, his popular appeal having prejudiced him in the eyes of the critical.

To praise a poet for his popularity is to dispraise him in the estimation of many critical-minded persons. But there is an important distinction to observe. Some of Will Carleton's homely dialect pieces have been circulated as widely perhaps as similar work of Mr. Riley's.

OUR BEST-LOVED POET

No competent judge of verse would, therefore, class these writers on the same plane. Shakespeare and Tupper in the same bookcase need not produce a confusion of their merits. Anatole France argues that there is no certain, fixed, absolute criterion of literary excellence. Doubtless he is right, but the "fixed principle" which he regards as wanting in the judgment of contemporary art, is seen to apply in the distant result of time. With all the legends of neglected genius, it is still to be shown that the world has ever gone long wilfully blind to really great work. It has a large hospitality, and often it seems to favour unduly the mediocre and the ephemeral, for these amuse it also; but from long experience, it has a shrewd eye for the occasional masterpiece.

Mr. Riley need not lead us into this debatable land; his fame is as undisputed as his work is valuable and sincere. He has never pretended to write above the heads and hearts of the plain people; never aimed in his poetry to be, in a literary sense,—

"too good
For human nature's daily food."

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

There never was anything perverse about his thought or his morals or his literary principles. It never would occur to him to go outside the decencies of life for a subject. His art from the beginning was a flower that took its richest hues from the life around him—the life of a simple, plain, virtuous, God-fearing people. So his work is clean, elemental, spontaneous;—withal motivated throughout by an endearing humanity which at its deepest and best is, I would almost say, a new note in literature—the special offering of James Whitcomb Riley.

Take this little poem which everybody—at least every woman—knows by heart. It is simple almost to artlessness, and yet it fully reveals the characteristic genius of our poet—his sympathy, his lyric lightness of touch,—above all, his power to speak to the heart.

*There! little girl; don't cry!
They have broken your doll, I know;
And your tea-set blue,
And your play-house too,
Are things of the long ago;
But childish troubles will soon pass by.—
There! little girl; don't cry!*

OUR BEST-LOVED POET

There! little girl; don't cry!

They have broken your slate, I know:

And the glad, wild ways

Of your school-girl days

Are things of the long ago;

But life and love will soon come by.—

There! little girl; don't cry!

There! little girl; don't cry!

They have broken your heart, I know;

And the rainbow gleams

Of your youthful dreams

Are things of the long ago;

But Heaven holds all for which you sigh—

There! little girl; don't cry!

I beg to say, with all deference to the court, that I would rather have written this tiny poem—this Masterpiece!—than the bulk of that correct but lifeless literature which is honoured by critics and neglected by the common sort of humanity. It would, I am sure, give me a longer, better title to remembrance. Like the child's rattle found in a tomb of the great Pyramid, it may carry to some remote age an articulate echo of our literature.

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

GOOD WINE needs no bush, and the critic is dispensed from praising Mr. Riley's poetry in detail:—from Mr. Howells, the great man of letters, to the humblest citizen of Boone, Indiana, there is no break in the chorus of assent. The tribute is one to personality as well as literary power—to our best loved Poet! Mr. Riley's poems are, literally, household words throughout the land, and to him more than to any other living poet is granted the right to speak to our most sacred affections. Finally, he fulfills the test of a great reputation backed by equal performance.

He is a poet of original impulse and inspiration; you cannot "derive" him from any set of literary forbears. Indeed, although he is a consummate artist, it would be hard to prove a *literary motive* against him. He is, in short, one of those fortunate artists who make literature unconsciously and, so to say, *without thinking about it*. The curse of the self-conscious pen, the smirk of the literary egotist from which very few American writers have been free (Stevenson

[176]

OUR BEST-LOVED POET

thought the best of us wrote like amateurs) is totally absent from his work.

He has been content with the simple, sufficing themes of life and he has never sought the abnormal, the repulsive, the unclean. There are no "sugared sonnets" of his dedicate to covert or esoteric vice. He brings us no *fleurs de mal*; his inspiration is not of the brothel, the clinic or the charnel-house. This is not to say that he has been afraid of life—few poets indeed have had so keen an eye for its dramatic contrasts, the mingled arabesque of good and evil, the astounding alternations in the smallest scene of human reality open to the artist's eye. But his art, like the sun's ray, is purifying, and the divine pity of a true poet transfigures his most painful subjects.

His songs of boyhood and youth, with their simple joys, their perfect faith and no less perfect illusion, are his best; indeed I think no poet that might be named has made this province so entirely his own or left such enduring trophies there. Has there ever been vouchsafed through the art of the poet such a vision of happy boyhood as Mr. Riley has given us in "Out to Old Aunt Mary's"? Where is the man who could read it through with-

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

out tears? The poem is too long to quote here in full, and it should not be cited piecemeal; but I plead against myself for these few verses that will surely make you want to do your heart a service by looking it up and re-reading it in the cherished volume.

*Wasn't it pleasant, O brother mine,
In those old days of the lost sunshine
Of youth—when the Saturday's chores were
through,
And the "Sunday's wood" in the kitchen, too,
And we went visiting, "me and you,"
Out to Old Aunt Mary's?—*

*"Me and you"—And the morning fair,
With the dewdrops twinkling everywhere;
The scent of the cherry-blossoms blown
After us, in the roadway lone,
Our capering shadows onward thrown—
Out to Old Aunt Mary's!*

*Why, I see her now in the open door
Where the little gourds grew up the sides and o'er
The clapboard roof!—And her face—ah, me!
Wasn't it good for a boy to see—
And wasn't it good for a boy to be
Out to Old Aunt Mary's?—*

OUR BEST-LOVED POET

*The jelly—the jam and the marmalade,
And the cherry and quince “preserves” she made!
And the sweet-sour pickles of peach and pear,
With cinnamon in ’em, and all things rare!—
And the more we ate was the more to spare,
Out to Old Aunt Mary’s!*

*The honey, too, in its amber comb
One only finds in an old farm-home;
And the coffee, fragrant and sweet, and ho!
So hot that we gloried to drink it so,
With spangles of tears in our eyes, you know—
Out to Old Aunt Mary’s.*

*And the old spring-house, in the cool green gloom
Of the willow trees,—and the cooler room
Where the swinging shelves and the crocks were
kept,
Where the cream in a golden languor slept,
While the waters gurgled and laughed and wept—
Out to Old Aunt Mary’s.*

Is it not but just that he who has restored the heart of youth to so many should be dispensed by the kind gods from growing old of the spirit himself? . . .

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

ALTHOUGH a poet of joyous impulse, Mr. Riley's ear is sensitive to the slightest tremblings of the minor chord. No poet has made songs more beautiful to express the pathos of remembered youth and happiness—the dumb regret for and hopeless striving to regain that Paradisal hour of life, even in retrospect, which occupy so many sad hearts. Mr. Riley touches this chord with infinite tenderness and with a power to soothe and console which proves him priest as well as poet. And we see very plainly that to be a good man is a necessary condition to being a great poet. The Baudelaires and the Verlaines have something to say for themselves, it is true, but it is not given them to make such verse as this:

*We must get home—for we have been away
So long, it seems forever and a day!
And O so very homesick we have grown,
The laughter of the world is like a moan
In our tired hearing, and its songs as vain,—
We must get home—we must get home again!*

*We must get home! There only may we find
The little playmates that we left behind,—*

OUR BEST-LOVED POET

*Some racing down the road; some by the brook;
Some droning at their desks, with wistful look
Across the fields and orchards—farther still
Where laughs and weeps the old wheel at the mill.*

*We must get home; and, unremembering there
All gain of all ambition elsewhere,
Rest—from the feverish victory, and the crown
Of conquest whose waste glory weighs us down.—
Fame's fairest gifts we toss back with disdain—
We must get home—we must get home again!*

The difficulty of writing such verse without lapsing into false sentiment is proven by the utter failure of Mr. Riley's imitators (no poet has ever had more) to produce anything like a passable copy of this phase of his art. There have been many—alas, too many attempts; but no mimic has ever succeeded in getting a foot within the sanctuary!

I HAVE pointed out, in a discussion of the so-called "free poets," that we are in some danger of being carried away from the primary function of poetry. It seems the poets don't want to sing any more; they want to do some-

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

thing else, and there is a great wrangle and controversy going on as to the nature and value of this substitute form of entertainment.

Mr. Riley has never been troubled by any doubts as to the leading function and business of the poet:—he knows that it is to *sing*, and it is as a singer pure and simple that he has won his dearest laurels. His music is varied, ingenious, sometimes a shade fantastic; but he never sings merely *for the tune*; always the poetic thought has precedence. Sometimes his passion for pure music and melody—as instinctive as that of the thrush or the bobolink—tempts him to a feat of rhymed extravagance, a bit of *roulade*, or if you please, a display of poetic fireworks; for which I at least would not greatly quarrel with him. There are moods when the mere beauty of a poet's rhythmic words steals the soul with delight, and the intellect also yields itself a willing captive to the spell. No poet has a more sovereign charm for the *dolce far niente* moods than Mr. Riley:—such famous and familiar charming as this, for example:

*Beyond the purple, hazy trees
Of summer's utmost boundaries;*

OUR BEST-LOVED POET

*Beyond the sands—beyond the seas—
Beyond the range of eyes like these,
And only in the reach of the
Enraptured gaze of memory,
There lies a land, long lost to me,—
The land of Used-to-be!*

*A land where music ever girds
The air with belts of singing-birds,
And sows all sounds with such sweet words,
That even in the low of herds
A meaning lives so sweet to me,
Lost laughter ripples limpidly
From lips brimmed over with the glee
Of rare old Used-to-be.*

*Lost laughter, and the whistled tunes
Of boyhood's mouth of crescent runes,
That rounded, through long afternoons;
To serenading plenilunes—
When starlight fell so mistily
That, peering up from bended knee,
I dreamed 'twas bridal drapery
Snowed over Used-to-be!*

This is mere “instrumentation,” if you please,
the artist running his octaves in the sheer bravery
of his skill (with one eye on the admiring audi-

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

ence!)—but who can deny the charm and delight of it? . . .

TURN WE again to his graver moods, and above all, to his mastery of simple pathos. Mr. Riley's power as a magician enables him to use the plainest words, the most obvious rhymes, in the highest service of beauty. His poems are taken from the heart of life and reflect a power of observation, an eye for dramatic values, a grasp of human nature that mark him off from the run of lyrical poets. His work is intensely vital, personal, *realized*: one is always held, challenged, fascinated by the story behind it. One feels too that the poet has *lived* all of these pieces; that they could not otherwise have been created.

Mr. Riley as a born poet and a true craftsman loves rhymes (and we love him for it), yet he rarely, if ever, falls into Poe's vice of laboured assonance and perverse rhyming. Yes, there's "Leonainie," but that we know was done "on purpose," a *tour de force*, and a wonderful take-off it is of the Poesque manner. By the way, his "Songs after Master-Singers" are delightful
[184]

OUR BEST-LOVED POET

essays in this sort of writing: they are better poetry in themselves and far more striking "imitations"—reproductions rather—than Eugene Field's exercises in kind.

Brilliant, various, versatile, prolific as he is, Mr. Riley has never lost sight of the integrity of his art; never permitted himself to be seduced and carried away by the lure of mere cleverness. All this says much for the restraint of the artist, seeing that he has been far-and-away the most popular American poet of our time and the most solicited of publishers.

I am aware that certain critics deplore the lack of "intellectual content" in much of Mr. Riley's poetry, and they find fault with the simple iterations and alliterations which bid so cunningly for the ear. But who can deny its appeal to the heart, or its power to evoke the earliest, happiest emotions of life? And it is justified in the only fashion that poetry need be justified—it has been taken into the hearts of the people. The high-brows may cavil as they please, and the new school of "free poets" utterly protest the music and the unfading garland. But the fact remains that to be so accepted of the people

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

is the grandest and proudest distinction that even a great poet may aspire to.

Mr. Riley was born to be the adored laureate of a close-knit, homogeneous people:—this we see by the attitude of his native Indiana. Our ever-changing citizenship forbids such a distinction in the largest sense; but it may at least be said that in our day this crowning honour has not fallen to any American poet in such measure and with such depth of love and admiration as have been accorded to James Whitcomb Riley.

SIX

ALMA LUPA

THE LATE Elbert Hubbard used to gibe and poke fun at the colleges and the classics with a careless freedom that argued no responsibility toward either. Perhaps, from the utilitarian point of view, he had a certain right to do so, and his own case furnished him strong, if not entirely convincing, arguments—for the man of positive talent breaks all rules.

There was much force in his contention against wasting time on dead languages, but of course one must be sure that the languages so described are really defunct. Latin and Greek certainly are not, as a schoolboy may satisfy himself by glancing into any good English dictionary. Elbert's argument, though clever and spirited, was far from being a new one—the advantages and disadvantages of classical training have been accurately assessed these many years. It is quite true that such culture would be wasted on the majority of

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

young Americans, who simply have no use for it. Not that Elbert had so frittered away any part of his youth: his Alma Mater having been (as he liked to say) the University of Hard Knocks. But the dispute has other phases than that which challenged the keenly practical, yet sufficiently idealistic, mind of Elbert Hubbard. For one thing he quite overlooked our debt to the Renaissance: indeed like other able men, largely self-taught, he did not realize how much he owed to Latin and Greek.

Again, I will grant that Colonel Ingersoll's definition of a college as a place where "pebbles are polished and diamonds are dimmed," holds a partial truth. (Like Hubbard, he was unduly prejudiced by his dislike for the ministerial profession—a rub of the classics wouldn't have hurt the literary style of either man.) Furthermore, I am glad to see a good deal of the "superstition" of the classics done away with, and I think it no bad thing that the world is fast losing its reverence for the "donkey loaded with Latin." Many a fool has got by to honour and preferment on no better grounds.

And yet, while conceding so much, I must still
[188]

ALMA LUPA

hold that for the scholar, artist or literary man, the good old classics, even in very moderate infusion, have a value beyond price. They stamp his soul with the precise image of Liberty, the most precious bequest from the ancient world. They impress his mind with the Law of Beauty. They instil into him reverence for what is noble—hatred and contempt for what is mean and base. They teach him restraint and economy of expression—qualities rarely seen in a writer without classic foundation. (I would rather that Bernard Shaw had learned Latin than music—it would have saved us some terrible loquacity.) In short, they teach him his own language—no man lacking the Latin discipline can be said to know English competently, that is, with the knowledge requisite to a literary artist. (Again I waive the exceptions which genius is always privileged to make.) What is so much of modern literature but a palimpsest over-writing (and be sure at the same time, *under-writing*) of the thoughts of the classic past? Wanting the clue to this ever fertile tradition, the writer has missed something vital, yet intangible and indefinable, which no amount of talent or skill or energy can supply.

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

And this *something* is the quintessence of style and thought, the heirloom of classic culture passed on to us by hundreds of generations.

What is it accosts you at once in the pages of Robert Louis Stevenson, say the "Familiar Studies" or the "Travels with a Donkey"? The *expression*—for the story is always a matter of secondary importance. Sickness did not permit this writer to live the life of adventure that he longed for in order to vitalize his creations: yet he never fails to lure us with the grand adventure of his *style*. It would be hard to find a less thrilling tale than "An Inland Voyage," as regards hair-raising experiences of the Count Fathom order, and it would be still harder to match among the great travellers and adventurers the beauty of such a page as this:

"When Villon journeyed (perhaps by the same pleasant valley) to his exile at Rousillon, I wonder if he had not something of the same appearance. Something of the same preoccupation he had beyond a doubt, for he too must have tinkered verses as he walked with more success than his successor. And if he had anything like the same inspiring weather, the same nights of uproar, men

ALMA LUPA

in armour rolling and resounding down the stairs of heaven, the rain hissing on the village streets, the wild bull's-eye of the storm flashing all night long into the bare innerchamber—the same sweet return of day, the same unfathomable blue of noon, the same high-coloured halcyon eves, and above all, if he had anything like as good a comrade, anything like as keen a relish for what he saw, and what he ate, and the rivers he bathed in, and the rubbish that he wrote, I would exchange estates to-day with the poor exile, and count myself a gainer. . . .”

In pure literature the French have a great superiority over the English. Why? Because they derive so much from the classic tradition, their language, the finest literary instrument in the world, being founded almost entirely upon Latin. And the Latin blood counts, too, of course. How poor would modern literature be without Balzac, Hugo, Dumas, Musset, St. Beuve, Guizot, Lamartine, Taine, Renan, Flaubert, Daudet, Maupassant, Anatole France! Matthew Arnold indeed was of the opinion that as Latin has come in a large sense to represent Greek, so in course of time French will come to stand for Latin. But

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

the spirit of culture will take care that in such an evolution nothing shall be lost. . . .

A little of the She-Wolf's milk, then, if you please! No true man of letters ever regretted his nurture at that rugged but kindly breast: his head and heart were surely the better for it. And it is still a potent, perhaps indispensable, element in the making of literature that endures.

SEVEN

A NOTE ON LAFCADIO HEARN

IS THERE any sort of reproach or bar sinister in the fact of a literary man having Irish blood in his veins, in his belonging much or little to the most deeply spiritualized poetic race in the world? That vision of the invisible world which is the delight and the despair of poets, to whom has it been given in fuller measure than to the Celt? Those preoccupations of the soul which token an immortal destiny, those strivings to regain an eternal inheritance which mark a people of the spirit, what race do they indicate with a clearer stigma? Is not the entire history of the Celt a rejection of the things of this world for the Shadow and the Dream? . . .

Yet one might think there was some reproach, or inferiority, or even degradation implied in the Irish name, judging from occasional hints dropped by illiberal, or superficial, or perhaps merely careless persons. For instance, Mr. F. Hadland

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

Davis, an Englishman, writing about Lafcadio Hearn in an American periodical, and writing exceedingly well in the main, has this to say on the subject of his racial inheritance as accounting for some of the characteristics of his literary genius:

“Can we in any way account for Hearn’s delicate, sensuous and ghostly style? I can suggest two possible, but by no means exhaustive, reasons—viz., his birth and the fact that he suffered from myopia. This method of procedure rather savours of chemical analysis, only in this particular case we know the salt is called genius, and we work back, on quite unscientific lines, to try and find some of the factors in producing it. Hearn’s parentage was interesting. He had Greek and Romany blood in his veins. The Greek accounted for his unquenchable love of the beautiful in everything he saw, combined with an almost equal love of the horrible; and the Romany for the fact that he was one of the world’s wanderers.”

The suggestion of Hearn’s myopia as a formative influence in his style, an idea that originated with the eccentric Dr. Gould, I have treated elsewhere. But is it not singular that a writer so well informed as Mr. Davis—he claims to have

[194]

A NOTE ON LAFCADIO HEARN

read all Hearn's books and nearly everything published about him!—should ignore the fact, obvious and indisputable, of Hearn's Irish blood? The attempt on the part of Miss Bisland, his first biographer, to trace his Irish forbears on the paternal side back to 1693, when they were Dorsetshire English, seems a rather foolish piece of pedigree making. It certainly was unjustified by the facts. There were mingled elements in Hearn's blood, but he was more Irish than anything else. Those who knew the living man never doubted it, and to my mind at least, his genius yields the strongest proofs of Celtic derivation.

This is not the first time Hearn's racial antecedents have been made to bear an invidious note. Mr. Davis seems to share an ugly, and I had believed, extinct prejudice with Miss Bisland, which prejudice is the more to be regretted, since her work in most other respects is deserving of liberal praise; while her slightly romantic friendship with Hearn gives her a claim of esteem upon all who are interested in the writer and the man. Her motives were, *bien entendu*, of the worthiest, to throw something of a picturesque glow about a life that in its earlier years sorely needed it—

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

that held in truth overmuch darkness and suffering. But in writing as she did, about Hearn's early family and religious associations, with her intense womanly sympathies touched to the quick and her feelings more exercised than her judgment, I suspect Miss Bisland did not render the best possible service to his memory.

Hearn himself was partly to blame for the undisguised prejudice evinced by his biographer. He had suffered much in his shy myopic youth; he had been ill-understood and harshly treated, and in some confused way he had lost home and friends. All this was not clear to Hearn himself, or at least he gave no clear account of it. I believe also that Hearn romanced about the sordid circumstances of his youth, and that simply from the quality of his imagination. There is little in what he tells to put a sure finger on; rather, most of it seems of a nightmare unreality. Hearn began early to brood over and fashion that appropriate legend of himself with which every artist is more or less preoccupied. He indulged this usually harmless passion to an extreme degree, until he had at one time hallucinated himself into the notion that he was the object of a systematic,

[196]

A NOTE ON LAFCADIO HEARN

malignant persecution by priests of the religion in which he had been brought up. But close readers of his work, including his letters (like Mr. Davis, I may claim to be one) know that in his later years he softened considerably and opened his mind to saner views. I believe even that he learned to laugh at his pet bugaboo of Jesuitic persecution.

Finally, with his partial disillusionment regarding Japan, notable in his last years, the pendulum is seen swinging back for Hearn, and the immemorial claims of race and blood are felt to be striving within him for reassertion.

In spite of home and wife and children, in spite of Japanese name and all, nay, in spite of the literary glory that Japan had yielded him, I believe he was never less attached to the strange land of his adoption than in the last year of his life. Something of the change must be referred, of course, to the loss of his place in the Imperial University, and his personal experience of the darker traits of Japanese character, traits which are indeed common to East and West. But I believe a deeper explanation is called for, if we would truly estimate this final phase of Hearn's

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

thought. A man can not add a cubit to his stature by thinking, nor can he remake himself as to his racial and spiritual inheritance. Lafcadio Hearn remained Celtic in soul, spite of his many years in Japan, spite of his immersion in the myths and creeds of a strange people, spite even of what he believed to be a sincere preference of Buddha to Christ. Oh, yes, the pendulum was swinging back for Lafcadio Hearn! Man is unto himself a mystery: by ways strange and undreamed of, across the opposing currents of a lifetime, the soul of a race wins back to its own. . . .

EIGHT

THE KISS

IRISE to a point of order. There is altogether too much kissing in the magazines and Sunday newspaper supplements; also in the asbestos favourites of the Circulating Library. Two arts are hereby joined in the indictment, for the literary offence is no less culpable than the pictorial crime.

A kiss in one of the Hearst magazines, for example, is almost equal to a statutory misdemeanour, and it makes the guileless reader *particeps criminis*. The artist always aims at the maximum of expression and effect, for the popular magazine is expected literally to kiss itself into public favour. Each month its gay-tinted cover bears the likeness of some pretty courtesan with rosy beak pouted for the kiss. There is no mistaking the Hearst girls among the many Cyprians of the magazine trade:—they have a way about them that is distinctly their own and that only the connoisseurs of love fully appreciate.

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

A sort of orgy of osculation rages throughout the world of current fiction and magazinedom, and the kiss is being passed around as an exceedingly good thing. A popular novelist like Mr. Chambers is generally rated by his kiss—I mean his manner of describing and *realizing* for the reader that species of caress between two persons of opposite sex. Upon this he (or she) lavishes all the resources of his word-painting and all his power of suggestion. Likewise the popular artist is esteemed for his skill in depicting the kiss, in surrounding it with all those yum-yum attributes which are better felt than described; at the same time avoiding any license too gross which might give puritanism the alarm. It is a subtle and delicate art, and no wonder that those who excel at it command astonishing emoluments. Women are very partial to it, as the kiss is the symbol of their power and charm; and the popular magazine is, above all things, concerned with milady's approval. So even the discreet Mr. Bok makes much of the kiss, both in text and illustration; but it is of the special "Ladies' Home Journal" brand, if you please, sterilized and, as it were, too good to be true; not in the least like the frank aphrodisiac of

[200]

THE KISS

the monthly "Hearsts." Mr. Bok's kissing girls never make you feel that you have seen them under the "white lights," or that they are out to sell anything—except the "Ladies' Home Journal."

The word kiss, you will observe, is of the class of vocables called onomatopœic—words that mimic the sound of the thing signified; and in a sense, onomatopœic must be the art that renders it.

Magazine fiction offers us all sorts and varieties of kisses,—passionate, burning, lingering, languorous, Lesbian (the kind that makes you thrill all along the keel and gives the uttermost sensation of goneness); kisses soulful, ecstatic, exalted, kisses pleading and importunate, kisses that madden and intoxicate, kisses that do everything but deny. There are kisses that lead to nothing worse than matrimony and a eugenic family, and there be kisses that conduct to paresis and the padded cell. Have a care then in making your choice, for many's the man whose undoing is determined by a kiss. For indeed the kiss is the woman, and the woman is your fate!

Persons of curious competency in this province tell us that the kiss between lovers yields a minor

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

satisfaction of desire: it is a pledge, a promise, an I O U of the inexorable Eros, a prelude to possession:—the kissed mouth will have the rest, says Balzac.

Maupassant observes that the kiss is only a preface to the Book of Love, but a charming preface, more delicious than the volume itself; a preface that one can re-read constantly with ever unsated pleasure, while one is not always able to re-read—the book!

The same instructed artist describes the kiss as the most perfect, the most divine sensation given to human beings,—the last, the supreme limit of happiness. It is in the kiss, in the kiss alone, that we believe we can sometimes feel that impossible union of souls of which we dream—perhaps only the hallucination of fainting hearts. The kiss alone gives this profound, immaterial sensation of two beings that are as one. All the violent delirium of complete possession is not worth that trembling approach of the lips, that first touch moist and sweet, and then that kiss silent, motionless, rapturous, and long, so long! to both.

Byron's description is better known to English readers:—

THE KISS

*A long, long kiss, a kiss of youth and love
And beauty, all concentrating like rays
Into one focus kindled from above;
Such kisses as belong to early days,
When heart and soul and sense in concert move,
When the mind's lava and the pulse a blaze.*

Certain rigid moralists hold that the woman who gives her lips to a man without lawful warrant abandons herself as effectively as if she gave all. . . .

This is perhaps going too far, but undoubtedly the kiss is a rare good thing, and we are passing it around joyously—at least in the magazines. . . .

The kiss is woman's supreme weapon, her most potent and subtle means of seduction; not Cæsar, not Attila, nor Napoleon might prevail against it. For verily the kiss has conquered nations, torn up treaties, laid kingdoms desolate, founded or destroyed religions, suppressed dynasties and changed the order of royal states.

It is also, as we have seen, important to the prosperity of magazines, the fame of authors and the reputation of artists.

Oddly enough, the kiss, as we practise it in the

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

West, is a stumbling block and an offence to some Eastern peoples, who are thereby moved to look askance at our morality. One hates to admit the fact, but those remote pagans, Buddhists or what not, unblessed with the "Ladies' Home Journal" or the Hearst magazines (those disseminators of culture, sweetness and light) seem to have a more correct moral feeling than ourselves in this regard.

"Let the reader reflect for a moment," says Lafcadio Hearn,* "how large a place the subject of kisses and caresses and embraces occupies in our poetry and in our prose fiction; and then let him consider the fact that in Japanese literature these have no existence whatever. Such actions, except in the case of infants, are held to be highly immodest." Elsewhere he points out that the Japanese regard the kiss as peculiarly sexual in its nature, and that they refrain from it, except in the most private circumstances, as from an indecency. Even at social functions of a free character where geisha are in attendance and saké is drunk without restraint, a Japanese guest is never known to kiss or embrace these girls, dedicate to pleasure as they

* See chapter on the "Eternal Feminine" in "Out of the East."

THE KISS

are: this infraction of good form is reserved to foreigners. . . .

But "East is East and West is West and"—I refuse to go farther with Mr. Kipling. In our half of the world sex is deemed the salt of literature as of life, in spite of a conventional hypocrisy which would pretend to "wave" it, in Podsnapian fashion, out of existence.

So it is that, by a shrewd compromise with our inherited puritanism, we have perfumed and prettified sex in the persons of Gibson girls and "Bambi" heroines, and are enabled to pass around the kiss as a good thing.

Vive le baiser!

NINE

THE "FREE" POETS

OH, WHAT is the matter with the young "free" poets? Why are they so pale, as if they drank cumin, or were exhausted by love? They boast of their freedom, yet are they not happy. Oh, what's the matter with the young poets, and especially, why don't they write some poetry? Sacred Apollo! can *this* be the matter with the young poets?

Again I ask, what's the matter with the young poets? It is proper that they should be in revolt against something—nay, *anything*; but by the holy Nine, not against poetry itself! Why do they write so much prose—they with their loudly professed hatred of journalism and their contempt for the perishable word? Why don't they use up their hot young blood in making love and poetry? Did not Musset show them how when he poetically mounted on his funeral pyre with *Déjanire*? Have they never heard of Catullus, Villon, Ron-

THE "FREE" POETS

sard, Shelley, and Keats? Let them write their golden poems now and postpone their smart prosing to middle age—it will be on them unawares!

Hearken, ye rebellious but impotent young poets, to one that was also young in his day and especially a Poet!—Hark ye to Catullus, and note how fresh that silver voice throbbing with love and youth and desire rings out from the tomb of centuries.

Vivamus, mea Lesbia, atque amemus!

Soles occidere et redire possunt:

Nobis, cum semel occidit brevis lux,

Nox est perpetua una dormienda.

There is no translating the solemn music of the Latin, but I venture to English the lines rudely, that no reader may have a quarrel with me.

Let us live, my Lesbia, and let us love.

The suns set, yet do they ever return;

For us, when once our brief light flickers out,

Comes the night endless of perpetual sleep.

Da mi basia mille—"Give me a thousand kisses!" he cries, and so his life flutters out in a flame of passion at thirty-three. But those lines

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

to Lesbia, with their melody more magical than that of Memnon's statue, "which at sunrise played," will outlast the Pyramids. Nay, not the less will endure his exquisite lament for his lady's sparrow, which—

*Nec sese a gremio illius movebat,
Sed circumsiliens modo huc modo illuc,
Ad solam dominam usque pipilabat.*

(Nor wandered far from her bosom, but hopping about now here, now there, still kept piping to his one dear mistress.)

Ah, that little sparrow-pet of the darling Lesbia, still chirping—*pipilans*—though Rome itself has been swept away since the song began!

List ye now to the prattling waters of Horace's perennial fountain—and tell me that poetry as good can be made without music. No, no! the gods still possess their secret.

O fons Bandusiae splendidior vitro

*Fies nobilium tu quoque fontium,
Me dicente cavis impositam ilicem
Saxis, unde loquaces
Lymphae desiliunt tuae.*

THE "FREE" POETS

Do you hear the immortal prattling of that fountain of living water, and can you in your conceit imagine any other formula of art and poesy that would have brought its music down to us? . . .

I scarce dare offer this poor paraphrase of my own to the unclassically tuned reader.

*O fountain of Bandusia,
Than crystal e'en more clear,
.
Thou shalt be deemed most noble,
Since I have sung thee here,
And the oak thy dear companion
From hollow rocks upspringing,
Whence thy waters downward leap
With a prattling and a singing.*

Or lend an ear while charmingly he coaxes Phyllis to make one at *un petit souper à deux* at the Sabine Farm, for which he tells her there has been provided a cask of nine-year Alban:—plenty to drink, i' faith! "Come now, last of my loves," he entreats (I know not how candidly)—"for after this I shall never glow for another woman."—

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

*Age jam, meorum
Finis amorum
(Non enim posthac alia calebo
Femina), condisce modos, amanda
Voce quos reddas: minuentur atrae
Carminē curae.*

Learn with me the sweet measures (he pleads) which you shall then intone in your most lovely voice. Black cares shall flee away before our song. . . .

And a late brother of these two children of the She-Wolf, the scarcely less divine Musset, how sings he this immortal pain and rapture of the poet? . . .

*Poète, prends ton luth; le vin de la jeunesse
Fermente cette nuit dans les veines de Dieu,
Mon sein est inquiet; la volupté l'opprime,
Et les vents altérés m'ont mis la lèvre en feu.*

Which I may paraphrase:

*Poet, seize thy lute—to-night the holy wine
Of youth ferments in the veins of God:
My breast is ill at ease, desire a burden grows,
And the parching winds heat me as a sod.*

Or this verse which Hugo flings to you with the grand gesture whose secret he possessed:—

THE "FREE" POETS

*Quel dieu, quel moissonneur de l'éternel été
Avait, en s'en allant, négligement jeté
Cette faucille d'or dans le champ des étoiles.*

*What god, what harvester of the eternal year
Departing, left his golden sickle here
Flung careless in the wide and starry field.*

Truly I suspect the old recipe is still the best—just to be young, and to love, and to make poetry that is music. The "free" poets are, of course, free to do otherwise, and good luck to them!—but who would not rather take a chance in the fellowship of Horace, Catullus and Musset?

I LIKE your talent, Ezra Pound,* but I should prefer your genius—if you would give me of it. This clever letter to me, these sparkling critiques, those delightful tilts with London's stodgy literati, I relish them all to admiration; but you that are young and a poet should be at other work. What prose will hold the years at bay like "Adonais" or the "Lamia"? . . .

I say as much to you, Richard Aldington: * the

* The most talented and productive, and not the least militant of the "free" poets or imagistes. Mr. Pound is an American and not especially proud of the fact; he lives abroad and his literary inspiration is wholly exotic. Mr. Aldington is an Englishman.

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

cleverer your critical writing the better would be your poetry—if you would only write it! You are paying in copper whilst the Muses offer you gold. Reserve your economy for the autumn years. In other words, do your poetry now and your journalizing later. He that speaks to you is no Osler, yet indifferent honest: youth and poetry are plants on a single stem!

Does anybody care a straw about Shelley's opinions on poetry or poetics? Could any man of taste endure to read through the controversy between Byron and one Bowles? Go to, then! Furthermore, your war upon the ruling canon and æsthetic of poetry (though I like well enough the bravery of it) is merely a futile and barren thing. Here is a plain answer to all your malapert manifestoes:

THE WAY TO DISCOURAGEMENT BAD POETRY IS
TO WRITE GOOD POETRY.

Manibus date lilia plenis! . . . Give lilies with full hands.

Have you done this or are you doing it, oh, scornful young poets? I would like to pay you the compliment, but really I have not seen much of
[212]

THE "FREE" POETS

your work, and of this scarcely anything which I would call poetry. Oh, but this is maddening!—can we call a man a poet who does not write poetry? Yet until you do this you but spit in the teeth of the wind. . . .

Again, whilst there is much to praise in your effort to free English verse of the *cliché* and the conventional, there is also something to blame, since you go too far. Stock phrases, expletives, silly personifications, shop-worn tropes, affectations of every sort, can be cleared away without injury to the basic form and principle of English poetry. But melody and metre cannot be dispensed with, for they are of the very soul of poetry.

A prime reason for loving verse is that it is *rememberable*, and it could not be so without metre or measure. But I agree that prosody should be a help, not a hindrance: I would give the Muses wings, not shackles.

The thing that we recognize as beautiful and that we can put away in our memory as an enduring possession, *that* is the special, transcendent gift of poetry. The poet who cannot give us this . . . well, there are the quarries!

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

I have read many alleged poems by the new school of "free poets" (as they are self-called), but only a few that were tolerable, and hardly a single one that I could have stored in my memory as an enduring possession.

There is always something suspicious when people want to play without observing the rules of the game.

In this case the something wrong seems to be a lack of positive talent or, I would even say, vocation. The "free" poets, so far as I know them, want to be free to write poetry without proving either their right or their ability to do so. (Exceptions made in favour of Messrs. Pound, Aldington and one or two others.)

I have examined hundreds of their little silhouettes or word patterns, and my conclusion is that the best of these seem child's play compared to the work of filling a Spenserian stanza with the true content of poetry. Such a stanza as this, for example:

*The sky is changed!—and such a change! O night,
And storm, and darkness, ye are wondrous
strong,*

THE "FREE" POETS

*Yet lovely in your strength as in the light
Of a dark eye in woman. Far along,
From peak to peak, the rattling crags among,
Leaps the live thunder! Not from one lone
cloud,
But every mountain now hath found a tongue:
And Jura answers through her misty shroud,
Back to the joyous Alps, who call to her aloud!*

Now I remember hundreds of such verses with perfect ease and surety (taken on in youth, I may confess), while I cannot re-word a single one of the silhouettes put forth as "poems" by the Down-with-Shakespeare School. In fact, I could as easily memorize the stipple of a stenographic report.

The success of one extraordinary rebel and poacher is responsible for this revolt of the "free" poets. It is a great misfortune to poetry that the peculiar vogue of Walt Whitman should have inspired so many untalented persons to go and do likewise. He had, I freely grant, compensating merits which none of his imitators may claim, though some of them more than equal him in point of productiveness. It is true that old Walt jumped the fence and raided the preserve of poesy

PORTRAITS AND PREFERENCES

by unlawful methods. But what was mere poaching in his case, justified to some extent by an uncommon talent, is rank vandalism on the part of the many graceless, ignorant and faking pretenders who take his name in vain.

Note, however, that the vogue of Whitman is mainly with professed literary experts or the sexually emancipated—it has never reached the mass of the people. And it never will, because of its almost complete lack of what goes as melody and metre. I do not remember to have ever heard an ordinary person quote a line of Whitman's, though—and here's a paradox for you—I have known not a few persons of quite ordinary talent try to write like him!

One of the oldest superstitions of the race—old even before Literature was so much as thought of—was that the poet should *sing*. Will the free poets remember this? They will find it an invaluable, nay, unerring test of vocation. And if they will accept it, ah me! how much trouble and vexation of spirit will it save them.

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

ONE

BERMUDA

CONCERNING THE winter climate of Bermuda, it is quite impossible to get exact *data*—in this respect Bermuda is like a lady whose age cannot be questioned. The tourist books “leave much to be desired” in the way of precise information, yet it is difficult to accuse them of perjury or prevarication. The hotel people, Cook’s agents, shopkeepers and natives generally are entered into a cast-iron conspiracy on this point. The same is carried to a sacrificial extreme. While I shivered in my overcoat, with the mercury at 49° or 50° (it was in mid-January), and ruefully watched a cold rain falling, Mine Host Paschal of the American House paraded before me in a thin sack coat, somewhat ostentatiously enjoying himself. Mr. Paschal was a diver in his earlier career and is a man of very rugged constitution. . . .

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

No doubt one feels the cold more in Bermuda from not expecting it, and also because the hotels generally are built of a porous kind of stone, which is bound to convey discomfort. The coral insect who made this stone, and who was indeed the original colonist of Bermuda, took no thought for certain climatic contingencies. Certainly there were a few days when I was glad to go to bed in the afternoon just to keep warm. Explanation was made that we were having phenomenal weather, and I freely admit that it was paradisial compared to conditions then existing at New York, to say nothing of Montreal, Duluth, or Calgary. Nevertheless, I could not warm myself with a lithographed copy of "Beautiful Bermuda," and I should have preferred a little more of the "semi-tropical climate" so lovingly dwelt upon in that admirable work.

Let me add that during my sojourn of a fortnight there were some days when Bermuda actually lived up to her literary reputation and came tardy off in no single respect. Ah! then she was indeed lovely, this daughter of the sun, and her strange fascination invaded my every sense, so that I dreamed passively of remaining ever captive to

BERMUDA

her strong toil of grace. *Pas vrai*, Bermuda? Well, then; I kiss your hands and say *au revoir!*—remembering only your smiles and forgetting your frowns and tears. . . .

THE BEAUTY of the sea colouring in and about Bermuda is hardly to be exaggerated. It would seem as if that great artist the Sun had proposed to himself certain experiments in this tiny paradise before trying them in the world at large. I shall never forget my first view of the harbour of Bermuda, at early morning, under a light warm shower, with a miraculous rainbow trembling overhead almost within reach. Nor my first glimpse of Harrington Sound, that wondrous jewel of sea-water enclosed within the island's green embrace:—it called to mind, in its image of plenary and satisfying beauty, Shakespeare's figure of "one entire and perfect chrysolite." Certainly here is loveliness that "the sense aches at," of which the heart cannot have too much, and whereof the eyes weary not by seeing. I returned time and again, but the beauty was ever the same, or rather infinitely varied.

At my time of life, having discounted some few

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

illusions, I feel that I could content myself in a white stone villa on Harrington Sound, with a sea of lapislazuli spread out at my feet. Especially in my present mood, as I am writing in face of a grim snow-drifted Connecticut landscape that quite corrects my notion of Bermudian inclemency. Property in Bermuda is quite reasonable *yet*, I am informed by a friend, who built himself just such a place in that very spot a few years ago. Now is the time to act before the American invasion fully sets in and a boom is developed. This calamity is imminent, but the Bermudians aver with true British pluck, that they will sell out only at the highest price. I think they dislike us, but our money is not strictly objectionable. Really, I am strongly tempted—after all, it is only forty-eight hours from Broadway. Ariel is there—and Richard Butler Glaenzer. By George—St. George, of course—I'll do it! Pending the necessary arrangements I cry with old Horace—

*Ille terrarum mihi praeter omnes
Angulus ridet!*

I had been strolling about the Public Garden at St. George, which is the oldest settlement in
[222]

BERMUDA

Bermuda (1609). The Garden is overgrown with weird tropical trees and plants, some of which to a Northern eye, seem endued with a furtive, conscious, malignant life (there was especially a cactus, armed with razor-like leaves which I am sure nobody could get past at night without leaving behind a few sections of his person). In this garden there is also a huge monument to Sir George Somers, Knight, who has been dead a long time, his heart being here buried. Sir George was, in effect, the original discoverer of Bermuda.

Leaving the garden, at length, where green and variously armed and tentacled monstrosities seemed plotting to detain me by force, I stepped into a quaint, narrow old street; still musing over Sir George Somers, Knight, and his buried heart. Suddenly I was arrested by a chirping sound, familiar enough to folk who dwell in great cities, especially in those quarters where pleasure of a certain sort is more or less frankly pursued. Looking about, I saw a shapely "yellow gal" go traipsing across and down the lane with two redcoats piping her off. The look on that girl's face, part fear and shame, part coquetry and anger, was not one to be lightly forgotten. It rises before me

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

as a silent reminder that I have something to say about Mr. Tommy Atkins.

“**N**ATURALLY!” you interject, since the red-coat gives a touch of colour to the island, while the drills, parades, regimental band concerts, etc., furnish diversion to the tourists. Don’t we know that the American lady visitors most unpatriotically dote on Tommy plain or in epaulets? Are not romances so furnished from time to time, some of them involving no end of money? How many Tommys do you suppose have been bought out of the service by American women during the past ten years? Enough to make you stare. American women are all snobs (the Bermudians will tell you), have a perfect passion for marrying foreigners, since that gets them notoriety in the papers; and some of them are not hard to suit—in their view, a soldier is the next good thing to a title. The uniform shows off a good figure, and when, pray, has the heart of woman proved obdurate to martial airs and graces? Also it must be allowed that there are American ladies to whose delicate ears the cockney burr seems the native accent of aristocracy. Oh, not really of the Four

[224]

BERMUDA

Hundred, of course; just comfortable middle-class persons from Brooklyn, or Boston, or Philadelphia. The expectation of such is the fond hope of Mr. Atkins, though it is at best only a lottery chance. . . .

But I am thinking rather of those weak ones of an inferior, childlike race who have had to bear the burden of Tommy in divers shameful ways during his age-long tenancy of these islands. The copious tourist literature offers nothing under this head. You may ask the omniscient Mr. Bell, who will look you in the eye and talk about the weather. The young woman at the Public Library is equally non-committal. The American ladies who cry out ecstatically that Tommy Atkins looks *too dear* in his scarlet dress uniform, evince no curiosity on the point, and would indeed consider the topic an improper one. But you can piece out the story for yourself by observing many faces among the coloured natives of Bermuda. Very good-looking they are as a rule and often with features of a distinctively English cast. Manners, too, decidedly better than those of our own emancipated coloured brethren. . . . Then, when you go to the Church of England service at the Cathedral on

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

Sunday, where the pomp of bedizened officers and red-coated soldiery, helmeted and superb, enforces the grandeur of the ritual—you may reflect, if you please, upon this item of the cost of British “civilization.” . . .

WE WERE walking along one of those wonderful roads, clean and smooth and actually *sawn* out of the living rock—roads whose material was mainly supplied by the coral insect and the labour of making them by the blacks during more than two hundred years of slavery (freed in 1834, they have had the care and labour of the roads until this day). These roads rank high among the attractions of the island; they collect no mud, being of porous coral limestone, which quickly absorbs the rain, and they require little cleaning for the same reason. Nature in Bermuda is a great labour-saver. (The authorities aver that no snow ever falls on the island, but I have seen a very passable imitation of hail.)

It was an almost perfect day, such as comes not infrequently in the winter season to restore hope to the shivering citizen of Duluth or Calgary, and to save many Bermudians from the fate of Ana-

BERMUDA

nias. We were ascending a low hill on our way to the sea caves, which are about two and one-half miles from Hamilton. A young woman of our party stopped to admire some bougainvilleas in a wayside garden. Nothing lovelier than the purple flowers of this tropical plant could be imagined—it makes you realize why this colour was chosen by the Romans as a symbol of power and aristocracy. We were sharing the young woman's raptures when an old gentleman accosted us from the roadside and offered to show us some finer specimens of the flower.

He was over eighty, tall, with an eagle beak and an eye still keen; but his head and hand shook a little from palsy. He led us up the road a piece and into his own garden on the crest of the hill. It was carefully kept, but seemed old like himself: the white house, too, had an aged appearance; though it was very clean and in excellent repair. There was an air of secular quiet about the place, and the great palms themselves seemed to show the slow effects of time. Presently we were admiring the old man's bougainvilleas, which fully justified his pride, and he was telling us that he had lived here sixty years.

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

“Yes,” he continued, replying to a surprised exclamation; “and my wife with me—she died only three months ago.”

As he said these words, the old man's voice broke a little, and we murmured our sympathy, while striving to picture to ourselves this incredible idyl. Sixty years of constant love and companionship had been his and *hers*, the old man told us, under this mild sky where the rigours of the North are unknown, in this quaint tropical garden whose brooding trees seemed to guard the secret of long life. Long before any of our party were born he had brought his young bride here, and for the space of two lives they had lived here together. Happily, no doubt, as human nature will permit, and sometimes learning that deeper love which comes only by sorrow and bitterness. We thought of the sadness of that separation, when this old Adam lost his immemorial Eve; of what must have been his terrible loneliness and longing—and then a pretty little girl holding a doll tightly hugged under one arm, ran up to us and took her grandfather's hand. He stooped to caress her, and as he did so, we were conscious of the Spirit of Youth like a living presence in that ancient garden. It

[228]

BERMUDA

was a relief to us all; and there were tears in the young woman's eyes when at parting he pressed upon her a splendid cluster of bougainvilleas.

SMALL AS Bermuda is, one sees exemplified there to advantage the British system of combining extreme liberty with adequate suppression of crime and disorder. Everybody seems to drink, especially the native Bermudian, white or black, who absorbs like the coral rock, though not preferably at his own expense. Even the police are not chary about drinking at the public bars, if invited, and they are a distinct source of legitimate entertainment to the free-spending tourists. But all this marches with a better all-round observance and enforcement of law than we have in New York, where a policeman would be "broken" for drinking at a public bar. I will not deny that in this respect, at least, the English seem to me the better administrators of liberty.

It need hardly be added that the presence of the soldiers—usually a regiment of one thousand men, besides a war-ship with its quota of marines—furnishes a strong deterrent to crime. Nor is Tommy Atkins shy at wetting his whistle, and in

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

this regard, his superiors nobly uphold the honour of England. But this liberality is apparently consistent with perfect discipline and good order. At the time of my visit (1914) the record showed but one homicide in forty years, and this among the blacks.

TWO

BERMUDA II

BERMUDA IS worthy to be celebrated by poets, but her honours in this respect are not oppressive. Larry Chittenden, the cowboy singer, has cast his poetic lariat there to some graceful effect, and my gifted friend Richard Butler Glaenzer pauses occasionally in his pursuit of the Great American Novel to throw off a sonnet. Also Mrs. Burnett has a fine villa, one of the island show-places, which persuasively recalls her agreeable inventions. However, Tom Moore, the Irish poet, who visited Bermuda over a hundred years ago, still remains her chief boast in the way of literary association. As Moore is a favourite of my own, I permit myself a few remarks in this connection.

Moore was a young man, in his early twenties, when, in 1803, he saw Bermuda for the first time—a little later he visited the island to qualify for a sinecure office connected with the Admiralty,

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

and sojourned there a few months. Moore got this job through the influence of Lord Moira (the revolutionary Lord Rawdon). What with his exquisite singing voice and social talents, he had already made himself a favourite in English aristocratic circles—a position he was never to lose but rather to deepen and extend with his increasing fame. Pictures of the poet taken at this time show an unmistakably Irish face, brilliant eyes (suggesting a certain likeness to Brinsley Sheridan) and a fine head of curling hair, which later earned for him the sobriquet of “Bacchus.”

Moore's Bermudian poems are therefore *juvenilia*, not to be classed with his maturer work like the “Irish Melodies,” still unrivalled in their blending of poetry and music. They are poetic epistles, elegant, elaborated and somewhat too cunning in their learned notes and allusions, which “Thomas Little” addressed to his titled and aristocratic friends, no doubt with a view to helping his modest fortunes. Nevertheless, Moore's “Odes to Nea” and other American pieces are not unworthy of his genius, though but a first draught of the vintage which had yet to win its full charm and mellowness of *bouquet*. Their passion is rather liter-

[232]

BERMUDA II

ary than real (Tommy was never much of a Lothario, his "amours" being mostly imagined for the exercise of his art). *Nea* stood for a creation of this sort, as in later life the poet hinted, rather than the "lady of the isle" with whom the chronicles seek to identify her. Once indeed the poet confesses that wandering together on the wild and lonely shore, he and his *Nea* very nearly "*fauté*," as the French put it; but even here we are not seriously alarmed for the lady's virtue. "*Nea's House*" is shown, by the way, and with very questionable taste, her descendants are traced down to the present, none of them exhibiting any marked resemblance to Moore. So legend arises at the popular demand.

Moore's century-old descriptions of Bermuda, whether in prose or verse, are singularly fresh and true, reflecting the reality like a mirror. Nothing finer can be imagined, it seems to me, than the following which faithfully describes my own impressions on entering the harbour of Bermuda:—

*Bright rose the morning, every wave was still,
When the first perfume of a cedar hill
Sweetly awaked us, and with smiling charms,
The fairy harbour woo'd us to its arms.*

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

*Gently we stole before the whisp'ring wind
Through plantain shades that round like awnings
twined*

*And kissed on either side the wanton sails,
Breathing our welcome to these vernal vales;
While, far reflected o'er the wave serene,
Each wooded island shed so soft a green
That the enamour'd keel, with whisp'ring play,
Through liquid herbage seemed to steal its way.
Never did weary bark more gladly glide,
Or rest its anchor in a lovelier tide.*

*Along the margin, many a shining dome,
White as the palace of a Lapland gnome,
Brighten'd the wave;—in every myrtle grove,
Secluded, bashful, like a shrine of love,
Some elfin mansion sparkled through the shade,
Etc., etc.*

Such lines as these help us to understand why Bermuda is exceeding proud of the admiration she inspired in the little dapper gentleman with the musical voice and the tip-tilted nose who paid his respects to her so long ago. As I have said, Tommy had not reached his high notes at the time; but even so, you will not hear such warblings among our pert magazine choir. I might also instance "The Snow Spirit," which is indeed the

BERMUDA II

loveliest of Moore's poetical tributes to Bermuda.

Tom Moore's House is the name given to an old mansion or villa situated on one of the loveliest points of Harrington Sound, and the tradition which affirms his residence there as a guest is fairly authentic. An old spinet is shown which one would like to believe he played on (modestly ogling the ladies therewhile); a room is exhibited as his, and near by the house there stands a calabash tree identified as *the* calabash referred to in one of his poems (to guard the tourist from error, some verses are thoughtfully placarded on the tree). I was glad to accept the whole legend out of love for the poet of my race who has given so much pure joy to the world. Sacred indeed are the vestiges of genius! I felt my heart uplifted, standing as I was amid a scene which could have changed but little since he lingered there and imparted to all this beauty the charm of undying song.

BERMUDA PRODUCES nothing that at all approaches in economic value the opalescent colours of Harrington Sound, or the varied splendour of her sunsets. The island can scarcely

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

feed itself, so small is its arable area, and therefore the American tourist, while offering himself a change of scene in going to Bermuda, does not make a revolutionary change of diet. How the coral insect knew, when it built this island ages ago, that New York would be able to send food there, is as profound a mystery as may be. It is true there is the Bermuda onion, an important article of export—(not so important as formerly, however, the Texas onion now making great inroads upon the market). By the way, this esculent seems to be so rare in Bermuda that at my hotel it figured among the desserts, and then only on grand occasions.

Farming is mostly in the hands of the Portuguese who have supplanted the blacks of late years, the latter here as everywhere having no taste for steady hard labour and preferring the lighter gregarious employments of the town. The Portuguese are amazingly industrious and saving.

Tropical fruits such as bananas, mangoes, etc., are grown rather for show than use, it would seem, the climate not being hot enough to give them their full maturity; I fancy the same is true of oranges and lemons. So there are a few drawbacks to a

BERMUDA II

“semi-tropical” climate, though the same are not set down in the tourists’ ritual.

But indeed, Bermuda is not to be eaten—she is to be just tasted, kissed if you will, looked at a very great deal, and temperately enjoyed. This sounds a bit figurative, but I have no better counsel for the tourist. . . .

Another thing the coral founder could hardly have anticipated a million years ago: New York sends money to Bermuda as well as food, gobs of it, by the tourists who pour in from December to May. (There is very little tourist business in Summer, though Bermudians vouch for a climate that should make Paradise envious.) Of course, New Yorkers are welcome for their money—Bermuda has the peculiar hard British reverence for lucre—but they are likewise a little feared. This applies especially to Americans who have acquired estates and winter residences there—no large number. They are blamed for demoralizing the labour market by paying fancy wages to their servants. English colonists of caste resent this, and in consequence thereof, are planning to make acquisition harder for the too-free American spender. His lavishness in the matter of tips alone has scattered

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

seeds of discontent among the coloured folk, who now think and talk about money (I have it on the best Bermudian avouchment) as never before in the annals of the island. This is embarrassing to the person of ordinary means, for every New Yorker is at first sight taken for a millionaire, and the truth being presently discovered, he is made to feel the tacit but eloquent depreciation of the Jungle (coloured hotel people, etc.). Positive inconveniences also arise from the same cause. It must be said in all candour that after a short sojourn, the parasitic atmosphere of Bermuda becomes oppressive. Spenders of the exaggerated Broadway type are not improving the native morals and manners of the island. I was told that a cub of a rich and famous New York family visiting there last season, amused himself by giving five-dollar tips for the most trivial services. This is the most hateful vice of the American "bounder," and next to this the depreciatory attitude which he adopts toward his own country with the first British Bermudian who sits down with him to whisky-and-soda. It is really curious how quickly our "bounder" takes the British atmosphere of the island. In this he is warmly emulated

[238]

BERMUDA II

by his women folks. Listening to them (which you cannot easily help doing) you would marvel how the American Constitution lasts overnight!

AUTOMOBILES ARE neither used nor permitted to be used in Bermuda. Many wealthy Americans have sought to override this veto, only to find themselves up against a stone wall. Common sense approves of this ordinance. The islands are smaller in area than we are apt to think, about twenty-five square miles; the roads are rather narrow, as a rule, with many sharp curves and turns, so that careful driving is at all times necessary. Then—and this is perhaps the strongest argument against the auto—the hotels make a feature of carriage drives to the various sights of the place, and thereby many of the coloured people get their livelihood.

These black drivers are generally polite and good-natured. George, a favourite of mine, had markedly English features and possessed a fund of information, always ready if not invariably accurate, as to all things Bermudian. His fluent speech, eliding consonants wherever possible, was a delight to the ear. In his accent there was a

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

trace of cockneyism, and very curiously, he sounded his “v’s” like Sam Weller; thus, “werry” for very, “wallable” for valuable, etc. It is many years, I understand, since this peculiarity dropped out of the speech of Londoners. A significant reminder of the long occupation of Tommy Atkins. . . .

George’s simplicity was charming: he had never been off the island and he was proud of the fact. Had he had any chances to go to New York? Oh yes-sa, ’deed yes, plenty times, but Bermuda allus seemed good enough for him. He noticed that some of those coloured boys that went to New Yohk (George was about forty) came back afteh a yeah or so and nevah ’peared the same-like. They spent their money for cough medicine en’ seemed to drap away-like, en’ then one day you heahd of a fuhnal. No—sa, I ha-nt any fault to find with Behmuda. In cou’sé the wages are *wery* small, oh, yes—sa, *wery* small, en’ if it wa’n’t foh the kindness of the tourists”—Here George delicately flicked the off horse’s ear and permitted me to reflect that his simplicity was not wholly free from art.

But simple these Bermuda blacks are, as one
[240]

BERMUDA II

does not find them in the States. Thus, I was talking to George about the freedom from crime which is one of the regulation boasts of Bermuda, only one man, and he a black, having been hanged there in forty years (this was quite recently and the police sergeant who arrested him is regarded as a hero). "Well, no—sa," said George, "it's true they ain't much bad doin's heah, neither among the black folk nor the white folk. En' it stands to reason why not—you jest can't help youself. You'se jest got to behave, for how'se you goin' to get away? S'pose you rob somebody or beat some one up right here in Hamilton and then run to Paget, or Tucker's Town, or St. George. What do they do?" concluded George, his voice rising with the triumph of the disclosure,—“why they jest telephone ovah dere en' git you!”

Nothing more naïve ever came out of the Jungle:—I regret that my imperfect transliteration of George's dialect fails to do it justice. . . .

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

A HALF-DOZEN Boer prisoners-of-war still remain in Bermuda, having refused to take the oath of allegiance to English authority. They have been on the island twelve years, expiating their stubborn and hopeless fidelity to their lost country, and they are the objects of much curiosity to visiting tourists. As prisoners-of-war, I daresay the government supports them, or at least makes them some provision; but they seem to live by their trade in souvenirs, cedar canes and caskets, calabash bowls, etc., which they turn out with remarkable skill.

I liked to talk with one of them especially, a short, powerful man about fifty, said to have been an officer under Paul Kruger's government. He had the grey piercing eye of the marksman, reminding me of that fatal accuracy of aim on the part of those war-like farmers, which cost the British Empire so much blood and treasure. It flashed suddenly upon me one day when I had referred to his "fellow-soldiers." "Soldiers!" he ejaculated, pausing over his lathe, "we were not soldiers, but freemen. Sixty thousand of us, young and old—nothing you could call an army."

BERMUDA II

A patrol of redcoats passed the open door of the Boer's little workshop as he spoke. I looked at the short, grey-eyed man and he divined my thought.

"But we were a match for over two hundred thousand of those British," he added, as if he had not paused in his speech.

"And listen!" he said, coming nearer with uplifted hand and burning eyes; "the Bible it says there will be a war, and then a peace which will be no real peace, and then again a war! We shall be twice sixty thousand the next time."

My heart swelled at the courage of this unconquerable rebel, and for the first time I realized how dear liberty must be to men of his simple, primitive type, austere and God-fearing. He had served in all the bloody conflicts of the Transvaal, from the Kaffir War to Jameson's Raid, and lastly in that great struggle which had almost brought the giant power of England to its knees. Majuba—Modder River—Spion Kop—what visions rushed upon me! Looking at him, this plain homely hero, my eyes misted and he seemed to grow taller before me, while his face assumed an air of grandeur

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

and something of solemn beauty. "It is the Spirit of Liberty itself honouring this soldier of a lost cause," I thought, stricken with awe; and I felt that my feet pressed holy ground. . . .

"I prefer a lemon stick," I said to the Boer, as I was about to choose a souvenir; "the cedar is too brittle."

"Try this one, then, with the cedar handle," he said, offering me a sturdy cudgel of lemon wood, the tough lemon tree of Bermuda. "You can strike with it."

"I take this stick," I said meaningly to the Boer, "not because I have any need of it—but because you *struck!*"

"Would God that I might strike again!" he replied, grasping my hand in farewell.

I shall never see him again, for he and the other recalcitrants will soon be sent back to Africa. Recalling what they have endured for their stubborn fealty, who will say that patriotism is not still the Greatest Thing in the world? . . .

There is an alleged remark of Mark Twain's (surreptitiously postcarded without Mr. Bell's approval) that the trip to Bermuda is like going
[244]

BERMUDA II

through hell to get to Paradise. My own experience was just the opposite—I got my hell returning! But going or coming you are bound to get yours—’tis a toll due to Father Neptune from which only hardened sea-dogs are exempt. How a man survives such a cataclysmal tearing up of his “inwards,” and surviving, how he ever comes to forget it or pass an hour without prayerfully remembering it,—these are mysteries beyond the unaided power of human reason to solve. Perhaps it is vanity that makes us wish to hide even from our inmost selves the picture of that awful “goneness” and humiliation. I got mine, at any rate, and I fondly believed that there was no second to it on the ship. But a large man, somewhat superfluously repeating my sentiments in an adjoining stateroom, completely undeceived me on this point. Listening to him, I felt quite ashamed of my own performance, and decided that I was but a raw amateur. I even told him as much, but he did not receive my observation in a friendly spirit—that is, I so judged, for his words were unintelligible. Well, well, under the circumstances, a little petulance seemed excusable. . . .

Do you ask me, shall I ever make another trip

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

to Ariel's enchanted isle? I reply, what man worthy of the name would be content with one kiss of a beautiful woman? . . . Not I, of a truth, Bermuda!

THREE

THE CONQUEROR

FROM THE very outbreak of the Great War, beginning with the hurricane dash of the Germans upon Liège, there was the usual public expectation of some great general or military hero to be cast up by the tide of events and to dominate the situation.

The public eternally wants a hero and the business of war is to furnish him, is it not? Well, then: the public will not be satisfied with boards of strategy, army councils, or even kings and emperors in the background. It demands HIM—LUI—in a word, the Man on Horseback!

But the Great War proceeded, battles were lost and won, cities besieged and taken, fortresses blown up, whole regions laid desolate and uncounted thousands of men slaughtered: and yet the Hero, the Expected One, failed to appear. Through the smoke of battle, through the bloody

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

mist of carnage, from lands near-by and from remote countries all eyes watched for Him intently, all hearts trembled with the wish to hail and salute the CONQUEROR!

Still he came not, though there were several false alarms which exasperated a public that deemed itself cheated in this monstrous war without a hero. Generals, generals, generals—princes and highnesses and excellencies—a world on horseback but not THE MAN: what sort of a humbug farce of war was this for which the world would have to pay so dear a price!

Responding to the popular desire, the newspapers sought to pick out and distinguish a hero; for it was to their profit to whip up the interest of the public, which flagged at times over the dull and censored chronicles of the war. For there passed many days without a battle or striking incident of any sort, and even the invention of journalists, unhampered by knowledge of what was actually taking place, often failed of its purpose. Thus for a moment General Joffre shone in the journalistic calcium; then the spotlight shifted in turn to Von Kluck, Von Hindenburg, French, Pau, and others. None would do after the briefest

[248]

THE CONQUEROR

exposure, and then the bold attempt was made to play up the Kaiser as THE MAN. But his imperial modesty took the alarm and his name disappeared from the official bulletins. The Crown Prince was tried with a little more success; however, he gave an interview and talked himself out of the hero class. Then the newspapers sought to lead out a statesman who would answer the public desire, failing a real military hero. Churchill was thrown on the screen, but he was so egregiously under measure that this attempt may be said to have failed even more decisively than the previous efforts.

The public fumed with exasperation and the newspapers were at their wits' end: they had tried their whole bag of tricks, including the most costly and brilliant American fakes, and yet here was the indisputable fact: the public was being flatly bored with the Greatest War of modern times—a war which, practically for the first time, had furnished the spectacle of men fighting in the air. But the public grumbled that it was more of a spectacle than anything else, and a great deal of vulgar wit was expended on the “Zeppelin pleasure tours.” Clearly, something would have to be done, and

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

quickly too, if journalism were to maintain its profits and its prestige.

Still the monotonous campaign went on, East and West. The official reports of the several powers engaged took on a deadly sameness, even to contradicting each other's claimed victories. There were battles, sieges, marches, counter-marches, assaults, repulses from day to day. The military censors were learning the art of newspaper composition: it seemed that they would develop a first-class journalist before they would turn up a great general. But meantime, alas, the public was being bored to death. And still nobody appeared in the wrinkled front of war to give even a momentary thrill of THE HERO—the Awaited One. Not a single man to draw upon himself the world's long pent up acclaim as the Napoleon—the Ney—the Murat—the Suwarrow—the Blücher—even the Boulanger of the hour!

In default of a real hero, the popular mind sought to amuse itself and at the same time give vent to its ill humour by playing with metaphor. Thus it said when the winter was well advanced: "At least there is one good general among them now—Gen. January! He will bring matters to
[250]

THE CONQUEROR

a head." And later on: "Gen. January wasn't quite up to the mark, but wait!—you'll see that Gen. February will make short work of this war."

Well, he didn't, and the real hero of the Great War was yet to appear and make his *coup de main*: which I am now about to relate to you.

THE WORST of the winter was over. General February had retired, having done his utmost to rout the two great armies locked in an unyielding embrace. General March had then come on with more than his usual snowing and blowing, and such was the fury of his assault that for a moment it seemed as though he would break the deadlock and whistle the combatants away. But he too failed, and recalling all his windy heralds and trumpeters, was presently forced to retire in high dudgeon.

Now, with the first mildness of the spring, a change began to make itself manifest in the war. There was a great abatement of the ferocity which had marked its earlier stages. Attacks and counter-attacks were still frequent along the extensive battle line separating the two great armies, but the tale of those killed in such encounters dimin-

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

ished daily—nay, it was even rumoured that the fighting was of a half-hearted kind. Also it began to be whispered that the hostile armies had neighboured each other so long in all the cold and misery and privation of the trenches, with bleak Nature as their common enemy, that they now found it impossible to attack with the old fury and hatred.

But it turns out that there was even a more potent cause at work than the amity which these racial enemies had found for each other in the long winter months of that terrible struggle. The real Hero of the war—the CONQUEROR himself was on the point of appearing!

A relaxation of discipline became the general order—a relaxation marked by some painful yet ludicrous incidents. A German soldier was court-martialled for failing to salute his captain—than which, as is well known, no offence could be more heinous to the Teutonic mind. His excuse was that he had started to do so, but with hand half-uplifted had been obliged to stop and *scratch himself* in a particularly odious manner. He threw himself upon the mercy of the court and implored his captain in moving tones to admit that he himself had set the example. At this the members

THE CONQUEROR

of that stern court evinced an unheard-of emotion, and, as by a common impulse, all began to *scratch themselves!* The soldier was dismissed with a light reprimand and withdrew, *scratching* himself gratefully to the last.

An attempt was then made to adapt the requirements of the manual of arms to this odd physical necessity, but it was only partially successful, and a perfect fury of *scratching* seized upon the whole army. This hateful exercise was practised everywhere and in the highest company. It was even found impossible to forbid it to the very waiters and other menials when serving princes and highnesses and excellencies. *Noblesse oblige!* These exalted personages soon adapted themselves to the unpleasant condition, without serious loss of dignity. Indeed it was soon noticed, as a vindication of the aristocratic idea, that the nobilities *scratched* themselves with an air distinct from that of the common soldiers; but it must be added, with no less heartiness.

Similar scenes, with a like accompanying laxity, were observed in the French and English camps. In the former, the humourous imagination of the common soldier had devised a complete *scratching*

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

manual or tactic. This had a very droll effect when performed in unison by a whole company, as it frequently was; but it must be allowed that the fibre of discipline was much weakened by these exhibitions.

The English were more stolid in their performances, as was to be expected from the national character, but they too *scratched* with great vigour, and as if such occupation were dearer to them than defeating the enemy. The amount of bad language and profane blasphemy thereby released among them was much greater than in the other camps, but it would be an error to regard this solely as an indication of ill temper, such freedom of expression being a favourite relief with the war-like English.

SUCH WAS the annoying condition among these unfortunate men-at-arms when one morning in early April the Sun, as if heartily entering into the jest, threw an unwonted heat upon them. The effect was truly indescribable (this is one of the seven oldest phrases in the world, but there is nothing to take its place). Every man felt as if he was being eaten alive,
[254]

THE CONQUEROR

and the futility of men scratching with only ten finger-nails was instantaneously recognized throughout those mighty hosts. They wavered still a moment, and then as another searching beam came from old Sol, they broke into universal flight, throwing away arms and clothes as they ran—but always *scratching!* Camps and entrenchments were abandoned with all their munitions, booty, etc. In a few hours that immense theatre of war was completely deserted and Silence had resumed her dominion over the scene (this phrase is also very ancient but quite indispensable to the serious writer). THE HERO had come at last. THE CONQUEROR had done his work. The Great War was over!

RECENT AS was this surprising event, it seems strange that there should be any question as to the identity of the real HERO who brought it to pass. But already it is clear that, perhaps from motives of national diffidence, an attempt is being made to rob him of the credit, not merely of a great victory but of the far greater glory of restoring peace to a world and ending a war which had threatened to engulf civilization itself.

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

Envy quibbles over the name of the Illustrious Hero, seeing that it cannot dispute his achievement. Thus, some authorities leaning to the German side call him GEN. LAUS; while some favouring the French name him GEN. POU (not to be confounded with Gen. Pau). What the English call him is left to the discreet conjecture of the reader.

Perhaps I may add, as a moral, that thus it will be seen the public is never really disappointed of its hero in like circumstances: come he infallibly will, though to be sure, not always in the form and shape demanded by the popular imagination.

FOUR

TWO PICTURES

THERE IS a famous passage in Carlyle which describes the meeting of two hostile armies arrayed for mutual slaughter and waiting only the word of their commanders. The common men of whom these armies are made up have not the slightest grievance on the one side or the other, nor are they moved by the least animosity. No supreme cause of country has called them into the field—they are there simply in obedience to the summons of their rulers, for reasons which touch them not at all, which do not concern their private fortunes or interests, and which they are not suffered to understand. Yet at the call of authority they have abandoned their wives and children, their fathers and mothers, their sweethearts or promised brides,—yes, all that attaches them to life, in order to shed their innocent blood and the blood of others innocent as themselves,

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

merely to gratify some capricious whim, some guilty or vain ambition of their rulers.

On each side there are priests actively exhorting these common men to do their duty: that is, to shed their common blood with courage, as they hope for salvation through the merciful wounds of Christ. And the priests are very careful to point out that in so doing they are but obeying the will of God, as expressed through their rulers, His chosen representatives. Now as this plea is put forth by the priests on both sides, and indeed ever has been since men first banded to slay and rob their kind, it follows that the horrible blasphemy is achieved of making God chiefly responsible for the crime of war!

Thus braced and stimulated by the blessing of religion, these common men prepare bravely to slaughter their fellows and to submit to be slaughtered themselves; telling themselves that it must be the right thing to do, since their rulers desire it and the priests sanction it. Yet they go to the killing with reluctance or indifference, at first, until very soon, with the blind fury and savagery which the spirit of war engenders, they are changed in despite of themselves. From harmless common

[258]

TWO PICTURES

men, thinking only with regret of their abandoned homes and dear ones, of their peaceful occupations, the idle plough and loom and workshop,—they are in a few moments turned into murderers, delighting and exulting in the slaughter of their fellows, maddened by the sight of blood, crazy to kill—kill—kill!—and lost to the instincts of humanity.

Something like this is the terrible image of war called up by Carlyle's famous description. I have here employed the idea—not the words.

There is another picture of two armies drawn by the hand of Karl Marx the Socialist, which, though not now so famous and admired as that of Carlyle, will in time to come be far more celebrated, invoking greater praise and blessing upon the name of its author. It is in truth less a picture than a prophecy whose fulfilment no remote generation is surely destined to see.

Karl Marx describes the meeting of the armies for battle in much the same manner as Carlyle. They are made up of common men—that most abundant food for cannon. They are summoned to the field by their rulers and have themselves no interest or stake in the matter, no cause at

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

issue, no passion of hatred or revenge to gratify; nor is there any true interest of patriotism to be served by the conflict to which they are driven. However, the priests are on hand to supply the cordials of faith and absolution; and after making the usual exhortation, they retire to the rear.

The armies are now face to face and almost eye to eye, when at the signal for battle given simultaneously on both sides, the mighty host of arrayed enemies throw down their weapons and with one universal hurrah rush into each other's arms!

In that tremendous shout the Spectre of War vanishes forever. The priests and the vultures leave the field where the Brotherhood of Man celebrates its holy rites. The rulers abdicate their thrones and the Era of Humanity begins. . . .

Who would not prefer the picture of Karl Marx? Who would not do what in him lies to speed the day of its realization? Who does not believe that what is now happening throughout Europe makes that Day as inevitable as the rising of the Sun of Justice!

TWO PICTURES

DEAD MEN are not the only fruit of war. Bellona gives life as well as death. Venus and Mars are the most ancient of lovers, and not the least fruitful. Even in the midst of slaughter and destruction, life preserves its eternal calculation: the seeds of another harvest are sown. Death never wholly conquers; Life never entirely perishes: they are equal and eternal duelists.

And Life goes singing to Death for Love has met and kissed him on the way. *Euoe Bacche!*—wait for the harvest! . . .

Listen! I lay no claim to prophecy, but this I will hazard: after the war there will be such a bursting forth and expansion of the joy of life that the oldest man shall not remember to have seen the like. The world will go *en fête* and with the harvests gathered on a hundred battle-fields celebrate the return of happiness and hope and security. *Euoe Bacche!* From the lush fruits of harvest gathered above the deep dreaming dead, men will pluck an unwonted desire for all the sweets of life—as if those who fell under the hand of Death, ere they might taste and enjoy, had so bequeathed their longing. Ah, terrible indeed

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

must be those joys that shall content both the living and the dead! Think of the countless host of young men, the picked flower of their several races, who died without having known more than the desire to love.

*O Hymen Hymenae io,
O Hymen Hymenae!*

They that fell sleep longing for a red lip and a white bosom will not be wholly cheated of their desire. The kisses of which they but dreamed will fructify in the wondrous harvest. Happy the lovers that survive!

OH, YES, it will be a grand time for Eros and Bacchus and all those ancient gods and goddesses whose business it formerly was to preside over the joys of human life. Indeed, they still revisit us from time to time and take a hand at their old functions, though we call them by ugly barbarian names and pretend to cut their classic acquaintance. They will all come back, Pan and Sylvanus, the ruddy laughing God of the grape, and droll Silenus, the saucy smiling Eros, the fauns
[262]

TWO PICTURES

and the satyrs, the free graces, the nymphs and the dryads, to hold such revels as have not been enacted among men since Olympus went out of fashion. Life is pagan, death is Christian: be sure the old gods will not fail this opportunity to repossess themselves of the world stolen from them by the Galilean. At least they will make a glorious try for it. *Euoe Bacche! . . .*

Life is coming back from death, while the desire of the many who were cut off in their bloom will soon burst forth in wondrous purple harvests—aye! in an efflorescence of joy that will overspread the whole earth.

We have mourned long enough for the dead—soon we shall drink and forget, intoning our *Nunc est bibendum!* Life is for the living. Love and Beauty and Happiness are here forevermore. *Euoe Bacche!*

FIVE

THE COLLECTOR

YOUR TRUE collector, like the poet, is born —not made. 'Tis a passion that shows itself early in life, even as doth poetry. Here, alas, the likeness ends, for the collector survives the poet in the human breast.

Who does not remember the schoolfellow that won away all his marbles and those of the other lads? How we used to gape and wonder at his luck, poor simpletons!—it was but the nascent genius of the collector. I recall, as a thing of yesterday, such a young hunk taking me to his home and showing me, craftily bunked in the garret, all his “shining gain.” Aladdin’s treasure was beggarly by comparison. I still feel the choking envy that rose within me at sight of that glittering variegated heap of alleys, agates, bullseyes, and marbles. Since coming to years of maturity, the
[264]

THE COLLECTOR

spectacle of no man's wealth has affected me half so much. And as I stood there mumping with impotent desire over those pellets of glass and clay, I felt a strange sinking at the heart, which an older wisdom translates into the conviction that I would never become a collector. The presentiment was only too well founded—I have never collected anything that the world sets a price on, and to this hour I stand naked outside the Kingdom of Junk. . . .

That collecting (in the technical sense) is carried to a point of unreason by many persons, may be easily granted. In strict fact, he is not worthy the proud title of Collector whose hobby appears anything short of a transcendent passion or mania for which he stands ever ready to risk life, limb, and fortune. Whip me those paltry varlets and pretenders who affect to be collectors from their base economies invested in the sweepings of cheap auction rooms:—it is not with such *canaille* we have to do here.

Collecting, like literature, has what may be called the grand style, which to achieve in some degree confers a sort of brevet or patent of esteem. It is a pursuit that has aristocratic affinities on

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

every side: hence, I suspect, the ardour with which it is followed in this country.

My purpose is not to "catalogue" the collecting fraternity, whose name is Legion, nor to enumerate the objects of their perquisition, which span alike the dictionary and the industry of man. Even to mention merely the principal classes of collectors were a mighty task. I content myself with glancing only at the collectors of printed things from *Incunabula* and Elzevirs to the broken volumes of Papyrus.*

T'other day I was politely requested by a firm of Boston book-sellers to state "what special line of books I collected," a blank form being thoughtfully provided for my reply, with a specimen page of a sort of collectors' *Who's Who*, which the said firm is to bring out.

Really, Messieurs, you do me too much honour! I have not the vanity to aspire to be a Collector, and still less—pardon me—the pertinent and necessary *pecunia*. I get my books where I can, and I confess to a partiality for hunting them out in old-book stalls, those repositories of the only

* The Papyrus: a small literary monthly edited by the writer from 1903 to 1912.

THE COLLECTOR

“second-hand” commerce which disgraces not the purchaser; and I pay as little for them as I may. ’Tis a traffic that appeals to me with its seemly pretence of learning on the part of the dealer, and that air of obliging you which no other merchant doth assume. But no “special line,” if you please, echoing my Boston inquisitors; I can read any sort of book if it have literary life-blood in its veins. The counterfeits of such I abandon to the hieratic or professional collector, by whom they are sometimes fabulously rated.

I suspect the vanity of exclusive possession is three-fourths of the collecting mania, but there can be, and commonly are, subsidiary motives, such as (I regret to say) pride of money, snobbery, the itch of singularity, pretence of learning, and mere pedantry. Indeed, though it irks me to censure ever so lightly any devotee of the gentle art, it may not be denied that a prevailing type of rich book collector collects for his own credit and public repute, rather than from a genuine love of learning or literature: he is, as a witty writer has said, a man *with*, not *of* books. Of course, I refer only to the American species: but the same reproach has been often alleged against his Euro-

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

pean fellow. Horace Walpole is the model that both seek to pattern by: he was, as Macaulay describes him, an indefatigable collector of worthless trifles and a prince among snobs. But he had distinction of a kind, and he remains the polished, perverse patron of rich collectors of the *parvenu* type.

It is the custom of our American journalists, who love to mouth money above all things, and therefore print no end of nonsense about rich collectors, to congratulate such persons fulsomely on their acquisitions, and to ascribe both to them and their "treasures" an importance which neither can justify. The enormous prices alleged in the newspaper chronicle are seldom, if ever, paid; the actual value to the public of some of the costliest and most ambitious enterprises of the collector is little or nothing. Here, as elsewhere, the journalist lackeying the rich proves an unsafe guide.

But my cue is rather the mania of collecting *per se*, of which Balzac has given us the heroic example in "Cousin Pons." That is a sad enough story, in all conscience, and generally speaking, I fear collectors do not have a merry time of it, spite of the flattering homage of the newspapers and

[268]

THE COLLECTOR

the even sweeter envy of the neighbours. Their works cannot follow them, of course, when they become *pulvis et umbra*, and *placens uxor* (rarely in sympathy with our manias) in default of strict testamentary injunction, is quick to hustle a life's accumulated treasures to the auction rooms. All are dispersed to alien hands, and *Defunctus*, instead of the proud memorial bust and tablet he had promised himself in some great library or museum, has this for his epitaph: *Vanitas vanitatum!*

I have been led into these somewhat drab reflections by seeing lately advertised, at auction sale, a library of rare books belonging to a collector whom I had quite intimately known. This worthy gentleman collected from as honest a motive as any, yet it were more than human if he found himself averse to the sort of notice heaped upon him by fulsome newspapers and flattering friends. His "great learning" was constantly referred to, which he, a cultivated man, but not at all a profound scholar nor privately claiming the character, took no pains to deprecate. And certainly there was great learning in his house, within the musty ancient folios or black-letter tomes, in the acquisition of which he had spent a considerable fortune.

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

It is very singular how a ruling passion grows, and surely the passion of collecting is no exception.

In the beginning this man owned his books, but when the mania reached its height, they literally owned *him*. Showing me his library of *Incunabula*—early printed books in Latin which he could not read for the life of him—he said that to get some volumes which would fill out his collection he would be strongly tempted to sacrifice the remainder of his patrimony.

This was certainly the vanity of possession, for as he could not read the books in their Latin text, it would be foolish to suppose that his passion was that of the scholar. No, it was the true mania of the collector: others with longer purses had outbidden him in his desire, and the fact left him craving and unhappy.

I can not myself see much use for a library of books mildewed and mummified by the lapse of centuries, which one does not read, and scarcely dare handle, and which one has to keep in fire-proof cases or at the Safe Deposit. (My friend actually kept there his most treasured volumes.) A book is the most familiar creature possible: life

[270]

THE COLLECTOR

offers us little to rival its companionship. Now to lock it up in a steel box, preserving it for a barren non-use, seems to me as foolish a thing as ever man conceived.

Add the consideration that all such books are to be had in plain honest English, if of the least value, and for little above the price of herrings,—and really I don't see what excuse there can be for such learned rubbish, outside a museum. That a man should spend his money and his life in the work of collecting these cast-off reliquaries of thought, these *exuviae* of erudition, is quite beyond my philosophy. But *there*, of course, is the mania. . . .

And I will not say (though I be myself lacking in the stuff of which your *preux* collector is made) that there is not something fine and heroic in the hobby. It is a passion at least, and a man with a passion may be condemnable in a hundred ways, but he cannot fail to be interesting and *alive*. This is always true of the greater sort of collectors: their strifes and emulations, their counter-marches and campaigns, have something Homeric about them, and the tale is one to which the world seldom inclines a careless ear. . . .

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

When *Goodman Grandet*, urged by greed rather than devotion, snatches at the silver crucifix in his dying convulsion, we are not shocked, so true is the touch of art; and we applaud Balzac for this bold depiction of the ruling passion strong even in death. . . .

To live a collector is to die a collector!

I doubt not that my friend's last conscious thought was of his books and of the enduring monument they would raise for him in the public remembrance. Having no children of his body, he might rely on *them* alone to carry his name to a far posterity. Hence, my sorrow at seeing them "put up and knocked down," as the shop phrase brutally has it, at public auction. It was, of a truth, in ghastly fashion like putting the man himself up and knocking him down; and I did not stay to see how his treasures went. However, the humour of the situation was saved by the presence of his brother collectors, competitors in the acquisition of *Incunabula*, etc., who seemed eager to despoil *him* as they will in turn be despoiled. . . .

Not to end upon a sad note, I urge the gentle reader, if he is not now a collector, to become one forthwith. 'Tis an amiable passion that adds a
[272]

THE COLLECTOR

great zest to life—nay, many wise persons think, prolongs it. For it is not to be doubted that the years of desire mark that term of life in which we are most thoroughly and vitally alive—not an inert nerve or pulse anywhere. Begin then to collect, by all means (—there are my own trifling Works and the aforementioned broken volumes of Papyrus). For to desire something is to want to get or *collect* it: and whilst we collect we live!

SIX

THE PENMAN

T'OTHER DAY, on the Main street of our town, I saw a man pursuing tranquilly an occupation which will ere long be listed with the abandoned trades. In point of fact, this particular craft or art (as I might almost call it) is little practised nowadays, and seldom seen except in country places. Even there it has much descended from its pristine dignity and has something of a barely tolerated character, while its practitioners have fallen to the level of street fakirs.

The man was writing cards at fifteen cents the dozen, and seemed to be doing a brisk trade. About a score of persons were gathered about his chair and table, some of them following with open mouth his curious skill. He was a very large man for such delicate work, and fat withal, but still he seemed perfectly cool, good-natured and comfortable. I joined the group of his patrons and

[274]

THE PENMAN

admirers; it was years since I had seen anybody earning a livelihood in that way.

A single glance told me that he was master of his art (really I must call it so). He wrote with astonishing swiftness and perfect execution; never blotting, or spoiling, or making a false-stroke; turning out the cards, dozen after dozen, with uniform ease and celerity. This mountain of a man had yet a small shapely hand which traced a script that an angel might envy; moreover, with curves and flourishes and shading that vividly brought back to me that terror and obsession of my school-days—the Spencerian Copy Book!

As the fat man pranced and pirouetted, cut the figure eight, looped the loop and did everything imaginable with that wonderful pen of his—it stood out at a right angle from the holder in a knowing fashion—I ran over in my mind some of the miseries I had undergone (the whole could not be told) owing to this cursed Spencerian penmanship.

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

THE SPENCERIAN Copy Book shades with horror (I am too sad to intend a pun) those early school-days; even now I can not recall it without a sickening sense of incapacity and failure. Humbly persuaded am I that no clumsy-pawed urchin ever made a worse botch of the Spencerian. The most prodigious pains resulted only in a horrid travesty, and a cursed trick I had of smearing the page at the last moment, necessitating a fresh copy, gave a Sisyphean cast to my labours. The fact that my own father was the teacher made things almost hopeless, for it seemed harder to please him than anybody else, and when the punitive ruler came down upon my poor awkward young fingers, I felt that despair which childhood only knows, even more than the pain.

What a fearful tyranny the Spencerian was, and not less a humbug! For how in common sense could a fumbling young lad be expected to produce a fair copy of that perfect script executed by the engraver's art? My father could not do it himself, nor many another teacher; but I was beaten for my failure. As well beat me for my inability
[276]

THE PENMAN

to walk on knives. I could not see the fairness of it then; I can not now. O those burning tears of youth, and that heart choking with the sense of undeserved punishment and injustice! If ever I have been a rebel since and a contemner of authority, if ever I have been a giber and a scoffer at things conventional or of the Copy Book order, let the Spencerian bear the blame!

I can not hope by any effort of language to express my envy and admiration of the boy who could passably imitate the Spencerian headlines in the copy books. Such a phenomenon turned up from time to time, and I envied and admired him with a sincerity inspired by the absolute conviction that I should not be able to do likewise in nine thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine years. As to that point my judgment was precociously correct—I still write what is technically termed a “rotten hand” (without a trace of the Spencerian influence), and the wise printer will not set up my copy except at price and a half. The test of reading it is the hardest I can propose to a stenographer—few are equal to the same. And to be strictly candid, I now and then throw off a page of caligraphic beauty (remote from the

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

Spencerian model) which the writer is himself unable to decipher.

The Spencerian has thus embittered my life, for I would have learned the typewriter in my journalistic period (as many reporters were obliged to do) but for the spirit of rebellion and ungodliness which that infernal system had engendered in me. I have had a machine in my house these dozen years, but I have never learned so much as to print my name—for the same reason. My present means of communicating my literary expression is about as choice a specimen of kakography as a captious connoisseur could desire to see. But I know what it cost me to acquire it, in spite of the Spencerian, and nothing shall ever wrest it from me—not even a typewriter! For in clinging to it thus stubbornly and passionately, I feel that I am somehow evening accounts with the monster that desolated my tender youth. . . .

THE FAT penman wrote right along while I was thinking as above, and I reckon he made sixty cents while I was losing both time and money. He was about my own age and might easily have been one of those boy wonders at my
[278]

THE PENMAN

father's school, who could do anything they liked with the Spencerian. (We were led to expect that they would infallibly get to be president of the bank, etc., but somehow they always came short of these glorious hopes.) As I looked, the fat man deftly traced a lovely swan with a scroll in its beak, bearing the name of a young lady from Rowayton, who blushed with pleasure as she received it.

The fat one made her a very graceful bow, and the tail of his eye descending caught mine with a barely perceptible wink. There was drollery too in this otiose villain, who sat enormous but at perfect ease, plying his little pen; while we his vulgar *clientèle* gaped and sweated round him.

An artist, I said to myself, turning away, and a hero as well, for did he not conquer the Spencerian, that dragon of my school days? But unless an apoplexy helps him off, I fear the day is not far distant when he will have to hunt another job.

SEVEN

CHANTICLEER

MAN, WHETHER of city or country, is largely the creature of habit.

One realizes this especially in regard to one's sleep—a problem that perplexes most of us sooner or later, who have too curiously meddled with our brains. And after trying both, one discovers that there is not so much noise in the city nor so much quiet in the country. There are those who sleep soundly and those who sleep badly in both places. It really makes no difference. Of course this corner of Connecticut is not what my little girl calls the “really real” country: it is but, so to say, semi-rural, uniting at odd times and in an exquisite degree, the disadvantages of both *rus* and *urbs*.

But my argument as to the sleep still holds, for the poet Richard Le Gallienne, who lives at Tokeneke in the deep country a few miles from

[280]

CHANTICLEER

me, has written an inspiring poem to "A Bird at Dawn."

I suspect it was not Richard's choice to be awake in the chilly grey morn and listen to the ethereal bird. Or maybe he only made-believe to have heard it: poets are long on imagination anyway, and most of 'em that I have known would never have heard a bird at dawn unless they had been out all night on a lark!

However, if we take Richard's poetic word for it, he was indeed broad awake when most of us want to be asleep and heartily curse the milkman or the neighbour's dog for breaking our matutinal slumbers. And that's the point that concerns us in this little homily.

When we lived in the Big City I used to have a "white night" from time to time. This was due not so much to early piety as to a habit I had formed of reading and smoking abed. A delicious habitude, I still protest, and one shrewdly suited to the philosophic temper; but I must allow that it has certain drawbacks. There was a risk of involuntary self-cremation, which kept the family in a state of expectant terror. There were occasional petty damages to the bed-clothes, to the

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

reader's "nighty" or pajamas—the small toll he paid for snatching his "fearful joy." And there was—worst of all and the only thing that moved him to real remorse—the speeding up of the mental wheels that led to the inevitable White Night!

Well, as I was saying, I didn't leave it behind me in the city: it still calls on me from time to time, although lately I am more given to perpendicular smoking (oh, I sometimes taste the sweetness of a relapse!), and I try to govern the "wheels" with a wiser care. Alas, how powerless are we to control that strange mechanism which tyrannizes over our life!

But I do not fear my white nights so much as formerly in the city, where one was crushed and overborne on every side with human life: here there be certain dulcifying circumstances added to the old Terror, which just now made me think of Richard and his "Bird at Dawn." He does not name the feathered warbler that gave him his delightful experience and indirectly enriched the world with a new joy. A bird, he says: no more. It is also to a bird that I owe the relief that has come to my insomnia, but I need not be so reticent as the poet:—my bird at dawn is Chanticleer.

CHANTICLEER

And how shall I describe the anodyne he brings me under the stress of my own self-evoked torture? . . .

It is always the same fight that wears out the dark hours. I try to think that I am not trying to go to sleep—the prescription of some heaven-born genius; and, as always, make a most exquisite failure of it. I invent weird variations upon the usual gymnastic of insomnia; I try every known posture and almost fetch up standing on my head. Then I say to myself, “This is foolish. I must not contend with *it*. I must simply ignore—forget *it* and go passively to sleep.” Excellent!—and I proceed to lie more or less passively awake for hours. The humiliation of the defeat—the consciousness that *it* is girding at one—that is perhaps the worst part of the punishment.

Sometimes I come very near to fooling *it* by listening to the trains. A great railroad runs not far from my house, and goodness knows how many trains pass to and fro at night. It is curious that I never give them a momentary attention in the daylight; they simply mean nothing to me. But in the dark night when I lie sleepless, yet perhaps not in full waking consciousness, the trains domi-

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

nate my thought. I yield myself willingly to this obsession, hoping that they may carry me away from *it*:—and sooth to say, often they do. These escapes are among the most ticklish experiences of my insomnia, and I would not deny that there is some compensation in the adventure.

But, at best, they are interludes as rare as fortunate, not to be counted upon for the *real bad* nights:—then, however patiently I listen to the long roll of the trains, filling our quiet valley with the shattering thunder of their advance or the mighty echoes of their retreat; attentive to their distant calls and signals, a formidable antiphony, and to all the heart-moving alarums of their tremendous rallies under the night sky; yet am I still dry-eyed and feverishly awake when the earliest raucous mutterings of Chanticleer from his cooped security very near, begin at length to unhinge my rigid mind and incline it toward sleep. He is the true warder of Morpheus:—what soothing peace in those first notes that irresistibly invite one to snuggle down and lose the tyranny of the night watches in a delicious haven of rest! How I bless the homely, domestic bird, true friend of man and eke his bountiful provider, beyond any

[284]

CHANTICLEER

bulbul or nightingale or lark or thrush that ever inspired the happiest rhymes of poet. Now my senses delicately drowse while I hear the Goodman telling his duteous wives that he is about to bring back day and light again. Admirable boaster!—sapient naturalist!—’tis not I would say thee nay. I catch their sleepy, syncopated remarks of loyal praise and admiration; but I am quite gone overboard and sunk in the ocean of oblivion, deeper than plummet e’er sounded, before the Coop bursts into full matin chorus.

Ah, *Monsieur le Coq*, good master Gallus, brave and worthy Chanticleer, honest lover of the warm, brown earth, I set thee above the feathered vanities that despise thee on thy dunghill. Thy humble life is all service and giving; thou art besides a model citizen, keeping thy wives in order and acquitting all thy duties with a relishing zeal. I salute thee, ancient witness and sharer of man’s best life, and were I a poet like neighbour Le Gallienne, I would honour thee with a song that should put to blush the finest madrigals in praise of those that condemn thee. What is, forsooth, all this folderol and skimble-skamble stuff about nightingales and birds of dawn, etc., compared to thy

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

terrene and solid virtues? Gladly I avail myself of the following simple yet inspiring verses which but do thee merited honour, and for which I am indebted to a modest poet whose virtues court the shade. Heartily I endorse his sentiments and hope they may find some responsive echo in a world where man is lowering his crest and the hen-minded threaten to usurp dominion.

THE COCK CROW

(Written at 4 A. M. on being awakened by a rooster.)

*Greeting to thee, oh Chanticleer,
That hailest the rising sun!
Brave herald of our masculinity,
Lord of the barnyard,
In this age of crowing hens
And cackling capons
Whom the hens do scorn and peck;
A henpecked age that says
All fowls must crow
And cackling is the part
Of those "weak things"
Who but lay eggs
And hatch the coming generations.*

CHANTICLEER

*Thy head erect, thy crest and plumes
Proclaim the dominance of the male.
When thou thy clarion call dost still
And hens borrow thy spurs to fight
To rule the roost,
And pluck thy plumes
To deck themselves withal,
What fate is thine, O noble bird!
What spurious call is that
Which greets the setting sun?
The crow of feminism's strident squeak,
Its brood in incubators,
Letting the emancipated mother hens
"Lead their own lives,"
Repudiate their motherhood
And duties to their race.*

*Crow on, O Chanticleer, crow on!
For when thy call is stilled,
Then race is dead, and art is dead,
And love is dead,
And unsexed hens can neither breed
Nor do thine errand in a world of strife!*

EIGHT

THE CIRCUS

IT IS about the kalends of May when the world grows beautiful again under the touch of Spring; when the pain and uselessness of toilsome effort presents itself as an overwhelmingly new consideration; when all out-of-doors breathes an irresistible invitation to come and play; when in truth everybody hates to work and the rural school-boy incited by certain flaming, variegated posters on the dead-walls, thinks of playing hookey for good and running away with the circus, and hesitates only between the choice of bareback riding and the flying trapeze. I pity the man who in his youth never entertained this dazzling idea, and I should be wary of doing business with him.

I was chewing the end of my pen this morning and waiting for an idea—which would not come, perhaps because I was not voting unanimously for it—a state of mental recalcitrance not im-

[288]

THE CIRCUS

proved by the chirping of an ecstatic robin on a maple branch just outside my window—when after some hesitant scuffling the attic door opened and there appeared a Delegation composed of the Three Youngest—aged respectively ten, eight, and five—who with a unanimity that spoke of thorough rehearsal, burst out clamorously—

“ Pa, we want you to take us to the Circus! ”

Bless my soul, I thought, what better thing can I do? And as the weak minority of me thus yielded, the Idea fled, saying, “ I knew all along that he didn’t want *me* to-day.” Then as I cast aside my work, the robin trilled forth a sarcastic roundelay—just look at the malice of that, when he knew how much *he* was to blame! I don’t care, I said, it is the Spring—and only the Circus can give you a real chance to be young again with the kiddies. It is their Lupercal—perish the task that would forbid these joyous rites! Let them lead me, I said, to the Aggregated Marvels of the Mastodonic Menagerie—to the glittering Ensemble of the Picturesque and Panethnic Procession—to the Riotous Resilience and Rutilant

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

Splendour of the Roman Chariot Race—to the subordinate, but no less Seductive Symposium of Segregated Wonders in the Sideshows—yea, even (Virtue, be calm!) let them guide my fainting steps to the Ten Thousand Dollar Beauty Show, to that Dazzling and Delicious Divan of Diaphanous Divinities—and I will consume peanuts with the youngest of 'em. Ma! get the children ready!

WHEN I WAS a boy in a little town on the Mohawk River up in New York State—a town that was very much alive with the whir of spindles and all manner of factories—there were two overshadowing events in the year—Circus and Fourth o' July. Other holidays there were, of course, but none of them—not even Christmas—meant anything like the same pleasure and anticipation to me. Perhaps because I was the kind of boy that had to look for his good times mainly on the outside. I fancy most motherless boys, without even sisters to help bring them up, would be of my taste in the matter—a taste for the sterner holidays.

Life was therefore of small account between Circus and Circus (I omit from present considera-
[290]

THE CIRCUS

tion the glorious Feast of Noise and Flame). I tried to save up my pennies, not easily come by, for the one as for the other; but from an early weakness of economy, as well as the parental parsimony, often found myself without the means of entertainment. Something like despair I have known since as a man, but nothing to compare with the bottom-out-of-all-things, end-of-the-world dejection and despondency of one small boy without even a lonesome nickel to bless himself with on Circus Day. Do you wonder that the Delegation mentioned above found me so easy? . . .

What an event was the coming of the Circus to the small boy population of our town! Nothing else was thought of, from the appearance of the first posters to the arrival of the show, heralded by strings of uncommon looking horses. Not the most ordinary courier or outrider but excited the deepest interest and was the object of endless curiosity and speculation. Whether the Circus was big or just medium size made no particular matter to us—it *was* a circus, that was enough, and we were equally interested whether it came by special train with imposing cars of unwonted construction for the menagerie, or just rolled into

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

town by the turnpike in its own tented wagons. It was romance in the concrete—the visualization of wonder—the reality of adventure brought near, all accompanied with that strange plucking at the heart which only boyhood knows, and for which it is most to be envied and regretted.

I would give much to recall my feelings when I had slept with one eye open in order to get up at cock-crow to see the Circus pitch its tents on Bilbrow's field, a space big enough for a Roman hippodrome. But of this I am sure, that romance has never spread a scene of such enchantment before my eyes. Oh, the heart-stirring excitement when the canvasmen,—those extra-blasphemous navigators of the circensian ocean—raised the great centre-pole of the Main Tent! It might have been done with less noise and swearing, perhaps, but would it have impressed me half so much? How cheerful the sight of them messing in the open air, while an immensely fat and good-natured black cook roasted huge steaks over a cunning camp fire! How I longed to get away from the tyranny of tasks and to be a part of that life, so free and careless, yet full of adventure it seemed; and how I envied the boy who, from time
[292]

THE CIRCUS

to time, ran away with the Circus! What became of that hero of one's early admiration seems, by the way, as profound a mystery as the ordinary failure of the head boy in school to take all the prizes in after life. I know for sure, at any rate, that he never got to own the Circus, and I suspect he paid dearly for his romantic yearnings. But as a boy, I would have enthusiastically swapped any future whatever for his chance.

All the details of this strange nomadic caravan life appealed to the boyish sense of wonder, which even transfigured the rough servants of the scene, as being of the fellowship of Aladdin. Those canvasmen, for instance, were the toughest lot of rowdies that could be picked up by the management, skilled in assembling that sort of material. They were in fact chosen for their fighting ability and disposition. Their manners were soft and gentle in keeping. I do not believe that any sort of human creature has ever surpassed the circusman of those times in the art of obscene blasphemy. His manners may be, and doubtless are, changed for the better, and he is now selected for peace rather than war. But my boyish memory is still fain to dwell on him as a spouting geyser of to-

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

bacco-sprinkled invective; an active volcano, so to speak, of sulphurous commination, whose cuss-words were merely the flowers of a picturesque rhetoric. In point of fact, the circusman swore rather more than seemed necessary even in his trying occupation, and I suspect that he did a lot of cussing just to keep up his courage. There was some occasion for this, I promise you.

Rushing the canvasmen was in those days a favourite diversion of tough youth: hence, the militant character of the tanbark retainers. There were places that the stoutest circusmen feared to "make," on account of the battles that were sure to be precipitated. Broken heads were not the most serious result of these scrimmages; sometimes, though rarely, a life was taken on one side or the other, causing a bitter feud renewed each year on the visit of the Circus. On this account, there were not a few towns which every circus deemed it prudent to skip, though good show towns and directly in their circuit (as the itinerary was called).

Our own town was pretty bad in this respect, owing to the large factory element in the popula-
[294]

THE CIRCUS

tion. It had the dishonour of raising one of the worst criminal gangs in the State, the members of which, after consuming their youth in desperate feats of hardihood, mostly died in prison. I always proudly understood that our town (in whose just fame for badness we small boys rejoiced) was one of those places the circusmen would rather have passed by. Certainly I saw some bloody battles between the canvas guardians and our tough youth, which gave an added spice of adventure to the marvels of the Circus. We small boys often profited by these encounters to scamper under the canvas and hoist ourselves to stations of safety—a perilous feat that set your heart thumping for an hour thereafter. But it meant getting something more out of the Circus than the nice boy did, whose papa or mamma carefully ensconced him in a reserved seat, with a disgusting provision of popcorn and peanuts. All great experiences are bought at a price!

I never see nowadays the type of young desperado who used then to affront the hardy canvasmen with their knotted clubs. He trusted to his hard fists as his only weapon, though his skill in tripping the adversary was not the least brilliant

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

feature of his attack. Ye gods of fistiana, what a rough-and-tumble fighter he was!—really, the battle that makes the sternest test of mettle and endurance. But alas! I sing the warriors of a past generation. Have we lost the secret of their breeding? I should think it a loss, if courage is to remain among the virtues of the sons of the people. The bold lads of whom I speak had a rough but not unworthy code of honour: they fought fair and eschewed the weapons of the assassin.

COMES BACK to memory now the pale face and undaunted blue eyes of the picked dare-devil of them all, a warlike youth called “Grinny” Keogh. There was a certain consonance in this queer nickname, arising from the fact of his being always agrin, even when most minatory and dangerous. This peculiarity served him in good stead, for it usually fooled the enemy and gave him leave to get in the first blow, which was the heart of his tactics. He knew not what fear was, and he risked life and liberty to win and keep the admiration of his fellows. We younger ones looked up to him with a sort of idolatry of wonder, which

THE CIRCUS

warms me even at this distance—a little matter of thirty-odd years!

I see “Grinny” now, with one or two lieutenants, facing a burly canvasman, while we younger ones, standing back a little, look on in a ravishment of terror and expectancy.

“Grinny” is smiling his pale smile while he parleys with the man, who is guarding a stretch of canvas in the big tent which offers an easy entrance. The boy, though smiling, is tensed in all his slight figure for action, while his adversary stands relaxed and careless, not dreaming of an attack.

Suddenly I hear “Grinny” say, in a tone raised for our attention—“We’re going in here, Rube, and you’d better not let on to notice us.”

The man’s face changes and he makes as if to strike the daring lad, but in a twinkling “Grinny” lands a smashing blow and the canvasman takes the count, while a raft of boys scamper under the tent. Often have I seen “Grinny” walk away composedly after shooing in fifteen or twenty boys in this fashion. It is true that I have now and then seen some boys caught on the inside following such a raid and most unmercifully clubbed

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

—perhaps a few of them bear the marks to this day. But that never deterred the rest of us when “Grinny” Keogh gave the signal for rushing a canvasman. . . .

I should hate to try it to-day—and have I not said that the breed of “Grinny” Keogh has become extinct?—but I remain convinced that no better way has ever been thought of for a boy to get all there is of danger and delight and adventure out of the Circus.

NINE

NOCTURNE

MY GOD! how like a dream life passes! To-day we are young, with endless time before us, free to postpone our most daring projects of ambition, of glory and fame; sure of ourselves, surer still of the vast credit of years we have at our disposal; content to dream of the task not yet begun and to anticipate the unearned reward. To-morrow we are of a sudden grown old, and all that limitless estate of time, with its possibilities of work to be done and glory to be achieved, seems shrunk to a hand's breadth, like the magic skin in Balzac's fable. All we know is that Youth was but just now here, and lo! it is gone. . . .

It is an evening in early summer and the sky is still red with the reflections of sunset. The man, of middle age, sits by an open window, holding a book which he appears to read; but for some time

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

he has not turned a page. This the man's wife, a few years younger than he, does not perceive from her station on the other side of the room where, seated in an easy chair, she is dandling a young child. Nor is she conscious of her husband's gaze which from time to time rests upon her with a curious fixity and intentness that includes the living woman no more than the book in his hand.

The silence has not been broken for a long time, save by the cooing of the child: married persons of middle age do not much trouble each other with unnecessary conversation.

His glance passes over the infant as ignoring it entirely, rather than with conscious indifference. Evidently it is not his child, for not so does a man of middle age regard such a pledge of love when it is his own. And though the woman's form plainly denotes her as having borne many children, there is lacking in her manner toward the babe on her lap that intangible something which affirms the mother.

Let us peep over the man's shoulder and see what he reads at this twilight hour in the Book of his Life.

NOCTURNE

AH, LIFE was good then, and better than they knew, in the prodigal spirit of youth. How sweet she was, the young wife, and how graceful her slim form and firm waist as yet unspoiled by child-bearing. People often took her for the sister or nurse of her two children. He remembered her small pretty head, with the delicate ears, and the long shapely neck which he loved to kiss when she was doing up her bright hair. How adorable she was in the first years of their marriage, and what happiness was his in the fulness of youth and desire and possession! Oh, that enchanted cup!—if he might but drain it again, how would he linger over every drop and savour its sweetness to the last! And he cursed himself for a spendthrift who had taken no account of his riches until all was gone.

Then there came back to mind a pretty childish trick of hers which used to ravish his heart with pleasure. She would pretend sometimes to plead for a kiss, standing on tiptoe and making a comical imitation of a poodle that “begs.” Nothing ever appeared so charming to him, he remembered with a pang at the heart, as again he saw that lovely

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

laughing face before him, and took it in his hands, and covered it with kisses.

Ah, my God! where is now that fairy childlike form, those pleading lips and eyes in which youth incarnated all its innocence and all its charm? Gone as utterly as though the earth covered her. . . .

These dear joys were snatched in the scant leisure of a worker on the press, and he thought, with a curse, of the furious expenditure of energy by which he purchased that little home nest. His job was a "rotten" one, in newspaper dialect, being that of night editor on a morning sheet owned by three old men who hated and envied each other as only journalists can. It was at least a blessing that they went home at night and left him to get out the paper. But the effort required to please all three and to keep clear of the intrigues always hatching in that atmosphere of jealousy and suspicion, made his place hateful to him. And how miserably they paid him for his hard service; how cunningly they bargained with his youth and inexperience, though so greedy of money for themselves!

Then he reflected that newspapers are built up
[302]

NOCTURNE

on the wasted forces of young men for whom the work has a fascination, with its false challenge to talent and ambition. His own servitude had been long enough, God knows, consuming the flower of his youth, and often he lamented with helpless rage those bright years gone down forever into that Slough of Despond. But Youth and Love, in their eternal fashion, contrived to save something from the wreck. There was this memory, for example, which now summoned echoes in his heart like those awakened by an old love tune. . . .

He worked nights, but had Sunday off, when some member of the staff would take his desk and cherish a brief dream of succeeding him; for poor as his job was, everybody wanted it in that house of famine. Also the three old men varied the monotony of plotting against one another by fomenting plots among the staff, which sagacious policy was supposed to promote *esprit de corps*.

But nothing could spoil the enjoyment of those Sundays which absolutely were his, freed from the newspaper grind and its harassing anxieties. If the rival morning paper got a "scoop" on his substitute, there was nothing in that for him to

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

worry about. Nay, perhaps, as he was not himself untouched by the mean spirit of the place and knew the calculations of the whelps around him, it might afford him a secret satisfaction.

Then, on fine Sundays in summer, they always had early dinner and in the afternoon went for a sail on the river. This was the great pleasure of their existence, and they talked about it from one week's end to the other. Nothing was allowed to prevent their being together on that day, and they were vexed if any of their relations came to see them. You see they were still lovers.

The sail was only a dozen miles or so, up the river and back; but the river was the Hudson and that little stretch of it between low banks lined with frequent houses and here and there a factory, though perhaps not much to boast of and certainly without real grandeur, will yet always seem to him the loveliest piece of scenery in the world. And to make quite sure that the illusion will remain, he has never revisited the place, and is thus privileged to see it with the eyes of memory.

NOCTURNE

THEY WERE always a bit late getting to the landing-place, where expectant passengers were cooped up until sailing time. For the young wife had to make herself very fine for this grand occasion, with her best frock and highly starched linens; and besides, there were the two children, a boy of four and a girl of two years, that had to be dolled up until the last possible moment. Sometimes a little vexed at her delay, he would pretend to start off by himself with the boy; and then she would hurry after him with a rustling of starched skirts and her pretty face red from the exertion, leading or carrying the little girl. Oh, they often tiffed about this and other trifles, as young couples do, perhaps to purchase the added sweetness of making up; but they loved each other well for all that. And very proud he was of her youth and beauty, and her perfect health that made her seem fragrant as a flower. Proud also was he of the children, pretty like their mother, and especially of the boy, his first-born.

On these Sunday outings, the latter wore a natty sailor suit, and his activity on the boat was

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

such as to keep his fond parents fully occupied; hence, they were always tired at night-fall and very glad when the little steamer pushed her nose into the home slip.

Sometimes, in spite of their best vigilance, he would escape from them and hide somewhere in the murky lower quarters of the boat amid the throbbing machinery, giving them no end of trouble to find him. Or he would conceal himself in a part of the hold where he could almost dangle his feet in the water. Then the young mother's terror would be great, and the father would swear to punish the urchin severely—but he never did. And now he recalled bitterly the many years marred by the waywardness of this spoiled first-born.

Commonly the boat was crowded to capacity, and there was a great strife for seats and good places in the bow or on the shady side. The crowd was sometimes so rough and disorderly that he wondered what he should do in case of an accident; and then he resolved to save his wife and let the children go; not without an agony as acute as if the issue were actually presented to him.

NOCTURNE

Sometimes, after embarking, they found themselves squeezed against the rail, each with a child on knee, and scarcely able to move hand or foot, while the little steamer raced through the familiar landscape. But even so, they were happy, smiling at each other, and thinking of their mutual joys; oftenest of all, of the darkness and the return home.

Usually they brought a lunch and got beer or soft drinks on board. Entertainment of a sort was furnished on these trips by a middle-aged German and his wife, both very fat, and their two young daughters. The man tortured a fiddle of ancient and disreputable appearance, the woman drew shrieks out of a battered concertina, and the frauleins, who were pretty and yellow-haired, sang popular songs. Their voices were sweet and shrill, and their cheeks went very pink when they sang this refrain, which seemed to be a favourite with the Sunday crowds:—

*“ She’s my darling Carrie!
Yes, the girl I’ll marry.
Every evening just at eight,
Standing by her garden gate.”
Etc., etc.*

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

This beautiful and thrilling ballad was especially called for on the return trip, when the shadows were falling and the lovers on board drew their chairs nearer for company, or better still, sometimes occupied the same chair. Then the fat German gave his old fiddle a rest and his fat wife ceased to torture the abused concertina. But first a collection will be taken, and then ladies and shentlemens, my daughters vill sing dot lovely song, "Carrie."

This announcement was always hailed with applause, and the collection was usually the heaviest of the day, causing the fat couple to exchange winks indicative of vast contentment. Finally the girls would take their station hand in hand, where the crowd was thickest with lovers, and set up the eternal refrain. Always they ended with this sentiment, which seemed to send an amorous throb through their audience, and which was usually followed by the sound of kisses, scuffling of chairs, and here and there a suppressed shriek amid the crowd—

*"Oh what bliss,
One loving kiss
From Car—rie!"*

NOCTURNE

The last stanza was long drawn out and executed in *crescendo*—it never failed to make a hit with the excursion lovers. And though our married pair laughed at the silly song, and the young wife looked with disapproval at the violent flirtations going on about them, there was something in the air or the words that drew their hands and hearts together and whispered to them of—Home!

Here the middle-aged man's meditations were broken by the entrance of a laughing young woman who took the child from its nurse's arms, saying: "I'm sure you'll think I'm imposing on you, Mamma, with this baby of mine. But"—with an ecstatic hug—"she's *such* a darling!" Then flinging a glance at the silent man by the window,—

"Oh, you needn't look so glum, Papa. I know you're holding it against me because I've made you a grandfather, a little before your time, yes? But for such a perfect love of a darling" (series of hugs), "who wouldn't put up with a little thing like that!"

TEN

YEARNINGS

YOUR LETTER gave me a deep thrill of interest and emotion. I am old enough to offer you this as a genuine compliment. But you are wise, and you know that age does not count with persons of the idealistic temperament, in matters of the heart.

Yet I am not happy in replying to you. I dread new friendships, especially with women, which make disturbing claims upon a writer and interfere with his work. For no matter how much a woman may protest her interest in your artistic effort, she is always more concerned to gain your admiration for herself. Fatally, inevitably she is a rival to your work, stealing the thought from under your pen, intruding her brow, her eyes, her lips between you and the face of your Dream.

Therefore, I pause ere I seal this letter, seized by I know not what presentiment of evil and mis-

[310]

YEARNINGS

fortune from an act so simple. But our expectation of blessings from the unknown is so strong, in spite of dolorous and repeated disillusiones, that I end by taking the hazard—as always!—and committing to the post the letter which is now before you. And the written word being gone beyond recall, I have an access of doubt and regret which causes me the most poignant misery.

Faint heart, you think, or perhaps more likely, the cold prudence of age? . . .

I hasten to reassure you—though not what men call young, I am still far enough, thank God, from what women call old. Indeed, Madame, I have to strive constantly against this incorrigible youth of the heart—at once the blessing and the curse of the artistic nature—lest it lead me into folly unbecoming my years.

But do not mistake me. I am stronger than I long was, for I have learned that Love is a terrible wastrel. And—pardon me!—I have other honey to give ere my course be run. After all, you see, the sun is not so high as once it was, and I cannot echo my youthful boast, that a woman is the only thing for me between the heavens and the earth. Ah, Madame! I have been thoroughly tried

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

in those sweet flames, and like holy Lawrence, I was anxious that the fire should reach every part. But one must pass on, after all—and especially, one must do his stint of work. . . .

Then your letter came, as many a letter has come, and an old unrest of the heart was awakened. Why did I feel on touching your unopened letter, that it held some portentous word of fate, which not to hear or know were better for my peace? Whence these intuitions, sudden lights flashed on the soul, which seem intended to warn and save us? . . .

I looked long at the picture of the beautiful woman which came with your letter, and all my old cowardice and much of my old desire awoke. Those eyes, that mouth, that splendid hair, the whole conquering charm and beauty of you, might well have overthrown a stronger will than mine.

Why did you send that picture if you were content merely to be, as you said, a friend standing in the shadow, with no claim upon my life? Do you not see that by this act of yours, you have given the lie to your gracious promises? I might have feared you less, had I not thus early learned how much there is to fear!

YEARNINGS

For in truth, I do fear this mimic semblance of you, as if it were the living woman whom I have never seen. The eyes seem to burn into mine—the lips seem to plead for a kiss—the entire sovereign seduction of you transpires from the pictured card. Yes, Madame, rejoice in your conquest! I do fear you; and I put away the picture where its insistent gaze may not affect my nerves, in order to frame a reply to your letter. . . .

LET ME begin by granting that a great passion is the highest gift that can fall to a man of the artistic temperament. I mean, of course, a passion which soothing and satisfying, yet never cloying the physical man, shall spur the artist to the fullest exercise of his talent. I will even grant that the artist lacking this ideal companion and, in a sense, collaborator, must fail of complete expression. Such a passion means to him, in a word, perfect health and efficiency. That genius gives the best account of itself which has its most fruitful dreams upon the bosom of love.

Balzac, much as he feared woman as the most fatal source of distraction to the artist, yet knew,

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

as he knew everything, how greatly art is indebted to her. And despite the famous chapter on chastity in "Cousine Bette," we know that he allowed himself compensations far exceeding his written precept. Nor did he ever let go the fair hand of woman, while building the immense edifice of the "Human Comedy," as if dreading to lose the one vital source of inspiration. During nearly twenty years—practically the entire span of his creative life—he wrote almost daily letters to Madame Hanska, making her, as it were, the patron saint of his achievement. This was in truth the greatest of his romances.

Byron, defending his connection with the Guiccioli—the most fortunate of his friendships with women—declares in a letter to Moore that a passion is absolutely necessary to the mental life of a poet. Further, he avers that but for his adventures and *affaires de coeur*, he would have vegetated in obscurity, voiceless and unknown, like many an English squire.

But, alas, Madame, how rare is such a passion among those clever but unfortunate people who make history, or biography, or scandal! It would seem that ideal matings are reserved to the com-

YEARNINGS

mon and undistinguished ones of the earth, or even the industrial classes. Who has not witnessed exquisite idyls of affection among the poor and lowly? Plumbers hit off the grand passion more luckily than poets. Haberdashers are more happily married than great novelists and dramatists. Even the despised race of vagrant tinkers can point to examples of conjugal love and fidelity which put to shame the chronicles of genius. A wit of our time has aptly expressed the truth in this paraphrase of Gray's famous line—

“The short and simple *scandals* of the poor.”

I suspect the poets have bargained ill with life, for what poem ever written can be compared to the perfect love of a woman's heart? . . .

You remember how Daudet explored this painful yet intensely human subject in his “Artists' Wives,” certainly the most acute and searching, yet withal delicate, analysis of the whole matter that has been made. What a charmingly gentle surgeon he appears in probing and revealing these lesions of the heart! What bitter truths he tells without bitterness! How pathetic these trag-

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

edies seem, which, upon reflection, we are astonished to find, present only the common stuff of experience:—it is the writer's art that has wrought the illusion. In Daudet's book, you will find every type of incompatible from the fool who hates her husband's talent and does him to death with her ignorant spleen, to the sly woman of the world who furthers her good man's interests at a certain expense to him unknown, in the peculiar French fashion.

In the prologue to this charming book (which only a Frenchman could have written), Daudet seems to hold the thesis that men of the artistic vocation should not marry, the risks to their work being so great in an ill-assorted union. By way of clinching the point, he does not report a single strictly fortunate instance among his collection of artists' wives. Daudet was himself most felicitously married, as all authorities agree, and his book seems to me the more remarkable on this account.

That wonderful short-sighted observation of his, long applied to the world of Paris, where such examples abound, reports only tragedies or failures.

YEARNINGS

Is it not cruel, Madame? But perhaps you ask, why is the artist so tragically liable to the misfortunes of marriage? Let me answer in the words of Daudet. The first and greatest danger of marriage, he says, is the loss or degradation of one's talent. The ordinary run of men are, of course, exempted from this observation. "But for all of us, poets, painters, sculptors, musicians, who live outside of life, wholly occupied in studying it, in reproducing it, holding ourselves always a little remote from it, as one steps back from a picture the better to see it, I say that marriage can only be the exception. To that nervous, exacting, impressionable being, that child-man that we call the artist, a special type of woman almost impossible to find, is needful; and the safest thing to do is *not to look for her.*"

BUT IS the artist more fortunate, Madame, in seeking outside of marriage, in relations condemned by religion and the social law, that peace and joy which only union with a beloved woman can give? I will not deny that such connections occasionally seem to favour the painting of pictures and the writing of poetry or music—

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

the paucity of the known instances and the celebrity of the persons lending to these a significance which they may not properly claim. Such friendships, of the left hand, are scarcely to be spoken of in this country, though our reticence on the point is no proof that they do not exist—I believe indeed that relations of this kind, more shrewdly concealed than in Europe, are far less uncommon than our conventional hypocrisy would allow.

Granting so much, what pledge of happiness do they offer the artist?—what hope of continuance, of fidelity and security? I believe in nothing so much as in miracles, Madame, yet there is but one answer to these questions. . . .

Alas, there is danger wherever we turn. The Platonic friendship has long since been laughed out of court—it is possible only to the old or infirm or sexually deficient. In the case of two normal persons, it is bound to end in possession, or—what is not so well known—in hatred on one side or the other. The man hates the woman who gives much without giving all; the woman hates the man who fears to take all while taking much. The sense of an unpaid debt leaves them permanently wrong toward each other. We touch here
[318]

YEARNINGS

the secret source of those wonderful acrimonies which are often disclosed among persons whose lives had seemed an open book. I should add that in these affairs, the woman is always more bitter and unforgiving than the man. With that special divination reserved to your adorable sex, you will readily understand why, Madame. . . .

Let me conclude, dear unknown Friend, by asking of you that which I fear to be impossible for us both. Remain unknown—unseen—unapproachable: yet a light in the shadow, a hope in the emptiness of barren years, a cordial to the often weary heart and drooping spirit! Let me worship you in secret—at once a glory and an illusion—like the unknown masterpiece of Balzac's painter. Let us, even like that infatuated artist, wise with the prescience of genius, forbid ourselves a meeting, a disclosure which could only put an end to our dream. Be and forever remain the unknown masterpiece of my soul!

Write to me sometimes, but—even better—learn to speak to me in the Silence . . . this is in truth the test of that higher love to which we both aspire. Do not, I pray you, ask me to come to see you . . . ah, my God! why did you send

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

that picture? . . . Rather send the voiceless assurance of your love to me as from a convent sanctuary whose high walls and vigilant guardians keep us forever apart.

Can you obey me in all this?

“Yes!” I hear you cry, with a dolorous and passionate eagerness. But even in the accents of that solemn pledge of renunciation, I detect the tone with which you will welcome me to your arms, and I know my feet to be set in the ways that lead to you!

WHEN THE writer had traced the last word of the foregoing letter, his brow was a little pale from the effort of composition and also from the emotion which his thoughts had induced. Sinking back in the deep study chair, he clasped his hands above his head with an habitual gesture, and said to himself in a half-vexed way:

“I swear this foolishness gets a man, in spite of himself. No aid to seduction so potent as the imagination!”

At this moment the wife of his bosom entered the room and kissed him lightly on the forehead. Then with conjugal assurance, picking up the

[320]

YEARNINGS

scattered sheets on his writing table, she glanced carelessly over them.

"Ah," she remarked indifferently, in no wise affected by the real or simulated passion of the written words, "so the women of unsatisfied yearnings are after you again? Poor dear!—what a bore to have to write such people."

"My love," replied her husband, a little wearily, "when they stop writing at last it will mean trouble of a more serious kind; for I shall then know that I have lost my 'punch.'"

"Ye-es," she assented abstractedly, still looking through the manuscript; "but her picture that you speak of so warmly—where is it?" And her tone became staccato all of a sudden, seemed to admit of no trifling.

"My dear," he rejoined in conciliatory fashion, "I did not want a recurrence of—you know what—(he winced as he spoke) and so I destroyed it."

Their eyes fully met and she held his long, but he did not waver.

"You are a dear," she said, after a moment's hesitation, "and also—though I your wife say it—an artist!"

ELEVEN

PLATONICS

I BELIEVE it never has been settled whether a true friendship, without love, is possible between the sexes. Candid philosophers say not. They argue that friendship as understood between men, "passing the love of woman," requires above all things a logical mind, and this they deny to the softer sex. Hence the noble friendships so often occurring among men, free from the taint of selfishness and appealing to the higher sympathies of our nature, are (they say) impossible between men and women. Sex is the preventing cause.

However, other philosophers have held the contrary with no small show of reason. Now and then they have even made experiments in their own persons—as, for example, Abélard—with results which, while not absolutely confirming their

[322]

PLATONICS

theories, have afforded some of the most amusing literature in the world.

To a simple mind, indeed, the spectacle of a philosopher meddling with Platonics calls up the familiar image of the monkey and the buzz-saw. But all things are not essentially as they appear to the simple mind.

So the problem remains unsolved and of perennial fascination.

Let me state it more frankly: Can a man and a woman of no great disparity in point of age and temperament have a close, hearty, and genuine friendship without any element of sexual love entering therein?

Isn't it a hard one? And what one of us has not puzzled his head and sometimes hurt his heart over it?

The French, to be sure, have blazed a warning for us in their famous adage: "A woman either loves or hates."

An epigram, you say, and only a half-truth at best. Ah, but who shall give us the whole truth as to any human proposition? And what a piercing half-truth it is! The more I learn of the sex—and, please God, I shall be always learning, lov-

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

ing, and suffering through them—the more I am convinced that it applies to them universally.

Oh, yes, she must love or hate—there is no middle way. And if this be true or only half true, it needs no argument to prove how vainly men sometimes seek a perfect friendship with women—a friendship without the crosses and the delights of love. I doubt if such a friendship is ever in a woman's thought. Recall your experiences. The moment a woman takes you up as a friend she loves you, though she may not admit the fact to herself: the moment she puts you down she hates you. It is quite a bewildering experience for the man, handicapped as he is by the logical faculty; but no doubt it has some secret satisfaction for the woman. To be much loved is therefore to be much hated: that is the bitter half of the apple.

For, alas! it is true that woman's love is near akin to hate—"a lovely and a fearful thing," as sang a poet who had drained the cup to the dregs. I sometimes wonder is either quality to be found unmixed with the other? Can we have love without hate or hate without love? The only glimpse of hatred I have ever had that quite appalled me

[324]

PLATONICS

was from one who had loved me very much—in a trice, by one glance from a woman's eyes, I was whirled from a green and smiling Paradise into a lurid Hell. . . . Ah, happy they who neither love nor hate!

A man who has had some interesting friendships with women of talent confides to me that the cause of their usual failure is the feminine lack of logic. A woman, he says, wants to monopolize you in friendship as in love. You must have no friends save of her choosing. You must take over and make your own her private antipathies and prejudices. You must like where she likes, dislike where she dislikes, and, in short, see the world through her eyes. The arrangement by which two men agree to hold each other in the firmest friendship without regard to the fact that a third man may be heartily loved by the one and as heartily hated by the other—that logical adjustment of relations which keeps the world in balance, is a function peculiar to the masculine mind and is looked upon by women as monstrous and immoral. Hence the impossibility of holding such friendships with them as were the dream of Plato, or even such wholesome, agreeable, and

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

mutually profitable relations as we so often see subsisting between men.

My friend also mentioned, as a curious experience of his in a Platonic way, that women import into their friendships with men—irreproachable friendships, of course—that somewhat cruel, feline and punishing spirit which they are said to manifest toward their lovers and husbands, recipients of their most intimate favours. A confirmed and perfect Platonist, my friend justly felt that any and every symptom of sexual love should be rigorously excluded from an ideal friendship between man and woman. But he was obliged to confess that nothing was so trying, in his harmless commerce with women, as the effort to secure this condition; and often he was made to feel that, though the caresses of love were not reserved for him, he got more than a due share of the scratches.

So far I went willingly whither my friend led me. But I pointed out to him that a stronger hand was leading us both back to the original difficulty, the *crux* of the problem—I mean the impossibility of the sexes meeting on any common ground but that of sex.

And there we dropped the matter, as many a
[326]

PLATONICS

wiser man has done since the days of Plato, and as whoso neglects to do shall gather fruit to his sorrow. . . .

Moral? Oh, yes! she must either love or hate.

TWELVE

FALSE YOUTH

THE PASSIONS make trouble for us during the greater part of our lives, and it may be true that, in a sense, they are themselves the deepest potential proof of life. Many people undoubtedly cultivate and cherish their passions on this presumption; some such are of our familiar acquaintance, while there be famous instances in Holy Writ and in the profane but no less inspired pages of Balzac. Instead of giving thanks, like Sophocles, that age has freed them from the tyranny of carnal desires, they dread more than anything the cessation of these, and they pray that their torments may continue with them to the end.

It is a common error to suppose that the most tragic and violent effects of passion are limited to youth: an error too much fostered by popular romances, as well as the public reserve maintained on this subject. Such exceptions as force them-

[328]

FALSE YOUTH

selves upon the public notice from time to time are dismissed as abnormal, and society refuses to discuss the matter.

No, it is not Youth that furnishes the darkest, the most fatal and convulsing dramas of passion, but rather that period of life we call middle age, beginning in man at the forty-fifth, in woman at the thirty-fifth year. Then or thereabouts commences for both a season of false youth, the Indian Summer of the sexual passions, during which desire is felt with a violence and exacerbation never known before. Especially is this apt to be the case if either the man or the woman have ceased to love his or her partner and is tempted to seek another object of passion: a lamentably common incident.

The state is one that demands for the fullest understanding thereof a psychological as well as physiological explanation, which it is not my business to offer. But this I will say: the malady of false youth is largely induced by the fear of age, with consequent loss of the power of pleasing the opposite sex. It may be that such fear is stronger in women than in men: the reserve which females maintain on the subject and the mystery with

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

which it is enveloped yield no positive clue. In this, as in other respects, woman keeps her secret; yet certain inklings, such as the revelations of Karin Michaelis, in her book, "The Dangerous Age," leave us to infer that there is little difference between the sexes on this point. That both men and women alike dread the end of sex-life, and the latter the more since it means the loss of their greatest power, are conclusions that may be frankly accepted. Hence that element of hardihood, of recklessness and desperation in the passions of middle age which so often shocks us in actual life, so as to merit the Latin appellation *nefanda*—meaning things forbidden to be spoken of, or under the taboo of Nature herself. Such incidents tempt at once and dishearten the portrayers of life. For the world will not have such disorders exhibited, except under conditions very difficult; it turns away from the most powerful depiction thereof in book or play as something monstrous and unfit for art. Balzac indeed explored this as every other sinister province in life, but it remains a question whether he is not more hated than admired for it; for the world dislikes to hear, quite as much as it needs to realize, the

[330]

FALSE YOUTH

terrible truths set forth with such unsparing realism in "Cousine Bette."

Even as such things are passed by in fiction or remain still-born in drama, so are they hushed up and smothered in the reality of every-day existence. Truth of this sort is indeed stranger than fiction, but society will not have it on any terms; rightly it feels that behind such explosions of ill-timed passion are forces that, if let loose, would tear the social structure to pieces.

The passion of youth is ever regarded as an *amabilis insania*, and all things are pardoned to it by grace of its talisman, Romance. We are not offended by the sweet unconscious immodesties of *Juliet*, nor careful to provide an expurgated version for our children; her story remains an open page to each new generation of maidenhood. But the world refuses to admit a romantic interest in the amorous disorders of the middle-aged; it sees only the fearful nature of the scandal threatening the peace and honour of families—the shock of a revelation which upsets the established belief in virtue.

All the world loves a lover, it is true, but not an old lover. Had *Romeo* and *Juliet* been of

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

middle-age we would never have heard of their sweet folly or star-crossed love; Shakespeare would not have immortalized nor the world canonized them; and it is very doubtful if a fugitive echo had reached us of the two old fools of Verona!

So it is that such passions and tragedies of the middle-aged, though always occurring, are seldom exposed to the naked censorship of public opinion. The honour of the community is engaged, as by an unwritten law, to suppress such scandals, and even the newspapers are apt to leave them alone. But we have all heard of such, and we shall continue to hear of them so long as the elements of human nature remain as they are. There is no change in the eternal Decameron of human passion.

I have referred to the boldness and hardihood, the extreme daring which often mark the "romances" of elderly persons; indeed they quite match or even surpass anything recorded in the Book of Youth. The type of Ninon is far from being an uncommon one among women. Elderly Romeos are taking the fatal draught, elderly Juliets are following suit every day; or both are coming by their desire without tragic *dénouement*,
[332]

FALSE YOUTH

beyond the occasional breaking up of a family on either side. In any case, high courage is required for the business, which is apt to alternate between tragic risks and a perilous sort of comedy.

Perhaps such misadventures would not happen so often if the world would but cure itself of these persisting illusions, namely:—

Its inexpugnable belief in female virtue and its incurable superstition that children preserve and guarantee a woman against temptation.

Its equally persistent and absurd notion that middle age separates a woman from passion and its liabilities.

Its foolish persuasion that woman is different from man in regard to the laws governing her sexual life.

False youth comes to both, and for the woman no less than the man it is potent to tear up the rooted sacred ties of life, flout the honour of marriage, corrupt the innocence of childhood, and turn the sanctuary of home into a romping place for devils!

Think not, Mr. Safe-Husband, that you may lay aside all anxiety concerning your dear wife, because forsooth she has passed her prime and the

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

tints of autumn begin to mark her beauty. Nay, now indeed you shall do well to love her and court her and cherish her and watch her as never before: of a truth there be wolves abroad and anigh who would not scorn your one ewe lamb. Are you a bit wanton and lickerish yourself, though a good husband as men go, and do you with a full share of that amiable conceit which hath been the cuckolding of many a simpleton, take it to be a man's privilege, etc.?—the discerning reader will easily supply the rest.

Have a care lest she learn the trick from you, when it shall go hard but she will better the lesson—mayhap to the sorrow and confusion of your house!

THIRTEEN

GHOSTS

I BELIEVE in ghosts. But hear me—I mean ghosts of the living, not of the dead. Ghosts that you can see at noonday. Ghosts that excite no fear and that present nothing spectral to the eye. *Ghosts to us alone!*—not to themselves or to the indifferent crowd.

They are, first of all, the women whom we have loved, perhaps too well, and who loved us in return, or made us so believe: but who are now as if dead to us, as we are dead to them.

Do not ask why—a stupid question. There are a hundred reasons for the thing.

It was but yesterday you stood very near a charming little ghost of this species, and she was not aware of your presence. You were both in a crowd at the Grand Central Station and you stood just behind her. In days that are past, she would have “sensed” you at once had you been

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

farther away. In love as in hate we are gifted with a second sight. But now she was totally unconscious that your breath fell on her right ear. The seat of telepathy is in the heart, you see, and you two no longer thought of each other—save as ghosts.

And yet it was not so very long ago that a casual meeting would have filled you both with joy—you know it, for there are some things a woman cannot dissemble. You thought the same thoughts, and sometimes expressed them in the same words, to your mutual fond amusement. Merely to lunch with her was a liberal education (if the shade of Dick Steele will tolerate the paraphrase). No sooner had you left her than you went home and wrote to her the things which you had forgotten or feared to say (she always knew they would come). And even in sleep you could not break the spell of her possession of you, which she maintained by a hundred quite innocent and exquisite seductions: now that it is all a closed chapter you are glad that they *were* innocent—that nothing really came of it. Nothing in your life was ever so sweet or so much to be regretted.

Oh, heart of mine (you apostrophize her warily
[336]

GHOSTS

and wordlessly) but a little while ago I would have followed you to the ridge of the world, and the desire of you seemed the whole of life. And yet here I am standing so near that I might touch you with my hand, but not the less I know you to be at an irrecoverable distance from me, and so my heart is strangely at peace—my heart that would once have burst at the enforced silence! . . .

You could see that there was an expression of calm wifely dignity on her face, the reflection of a tranquil, assured, and conventional happiness. She was still pretty, but without a certain bird-like coquetry of *allure* incompatible with the married state. And you recollected the charming little *moue* she sometimes made when teasing you. . . . But, as you were saying, the lady is now a ghost! . . .

WHAT STRANGE emotion quickens the heart on coming face to face unexpectedly with one of those animated spectres who bear a relation to us quite different from the rest of the breathing world! As I have said, a kind of second sight seems called into play by this melancholy

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

rencontre, for you see the living-dead with a weird and startling clearness—as one sees the face of an enemy in a dream!—yet almost without consciously observing him. And all the time you feel as if a cold wind blew upon you and you stood in the very presence of Fate. And without eye meeting eye or by any the least sign giving token of recognition, you feel yourself subjected to the like terrible stripping and scrutiny by the x-ray of hate that once was love.

Such meetings are very unpleasant, but they help you to realize that life is not all bridge and marmalade.

Just the other day, in this fashion, I encountered my old crony Whiffles for the first time in the dozen years since our alienation. I never did you wrong, O Whiffles, and if you wronged me, your friend, I forgive you; but ghosts we shall be to each other until the Great Release. . . .

A good fellow Whiffles, and I was fond of him, in spite of his terrible Scotch egotism and his tyrannous rule of the talk (never was such a coursing tongue hung in a Scotchman's jowl), and his variant, flyaway humours. A very human creature withal, of a spirit that often threw out

GHOSTS

strange lights that seemed to portend no common destiny.

Maybe I liked him the better for his roaring Keltic faults, seeing that he could be as tender and faithful a friend as our favourite *Alan Breck* (in those days Robert Louis was our god and a bond betwixt us),—and hang it! youth is of a grand tolerance when its loyalty and affection are engaged. I knew men who constantly longed and daily vowed to smash Whiffles, but his anfractuosities pleased me, like a *sauce piquante*.

How did we break? A stupid thing to ask, since the finest and firmest friendships are dissolved every hour for the veriest trifle. The wonder would be if there were ever a *real* cause!

Then I almost ran into the arms of this old friend with whom I have shared some of the best hours of my youth, while we talked and drank our fill and disputed each other's pet opinions. I say I liked Whiffles and so at times I would affect to give in, else he might have brought a sickness on himself with his lust to overcome me. But I never really was vanquished or convinced by the man. And yet I should ask nothing better than to go back through those long years of estrangement

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

and hold head to him again over the drink and the debate.

Well, as I was saying, almost I tumbled into his arms; but the sight of a living ghost acts marvelously in restoring one's self-possession, and I got a grip on myself just in time to avoid an awkward situation. Maybe they know in Heaven just how long I parried an impulse to take him by the hand in the name of our old comradeship—it was a space too brief to estimate as we reckon time here below. But in these affairs the heart is ruled by a sure intuition. Whiffles and I exchanged the x-ray of the alienated and passed each other as strangers. . . . A tall man, with a reddish-grey beard (it flamed like his temper when I knew him), the least supernatural person in appearance that you could wish to look on; but so far as I am concerned, as veritable a ghost as ever walked the ways of the living. . . .

DO NOT think to frighten me with tales of the dead who leave their resting graves at night to pursue some uncanny mission. The churchyard never held a fear for me, and if the dead walked my path, I would brush them from me like sum-
[340]

GHOSTS

mér insects. Ah! believe me, the grave never produced a pang like that seizure of the heart, that death-in-life sensation with which we must greet a living ghost from out our past, though seen at noon-day. I am fey for days after seeing one—even such a rosy blue-eyed spectre as the little woman mentioned above.

Do you wonder, then, that I hold to this position:—If there must be ghosts, let them come from death, not life!

FOURTEEN

THE AGE OF SAFETY

NOT LONG ago a sly little troll of a Scandinavian woman put forth a book which she called "The Dangerous Age." It made something of a pothor, owing to the frankness of the author in dealing with matters of sex that are, generally speaking, taboo with us. One expects a literary woman to go far along this line (indecenty is her *forte* when she really sets out to shock us), but the little Scandinavian person went the limit. And she quite riddled the old notion that virtue is a matter of geography, as expressed in Byron's couplet—

*What men call gallantry and gods adult'ry,
Is much more common where the climate's sultry.*

I was myself surprised that in the frozen North there could be such prurient consideration of a theme which is usually left to the Latin South for
[342]

THE AGE OF SAFETY

congenial literary treatment. Undoubtedly, that aided the modest author in her evident purpose to make a scandal and a sensation, in which she perfectly succeeded.

The little Scandinavian woman made even wicked Lutetia stare with her frank disclosure of certain things which women are never supposed to reveal, save in the most intimate confidences among themselves. She broke the Law of Sex, or in male parlance, "struck below the belt," and thereby forfeited the sympathy and support of women. Therefore, her visit to this country was a failure: even Madame New York could not tolerate a woman who boldly avowed, through the heroine of her fiction, that she liked men to go unbathed—with the charm about them of Horace's "*olentis hirci!*" Moreover, she had humiliated all womanhood by revealing secrets of the gynceum never whispered before, thus affording new weapons to the common enemy Man! It was too much even for the robust candour which certain advanced females among us import into their discussions of Sex. Charlotte Perkins Gilman positively refused to meet this imprudent sister of the North—and what could you expect after that?

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

Her visit to America was, as I have said, a failure socially, and I suspect her publishers were not much in pocket thereby.

However, it must be allowed that her book was a good deal of a success, and got itself read and wrangled about pretty much the world over. She had "told on" her sex, as perhaps never woman writer had done before. Unlovely as the revelation was, that was enough to make her book sought after by all manner of people. Men liked it much better than women, for an obvious reason—it had snatched away the veil from the inscrutability of sex.

But there is a larger profit for them in this book, if they will consider it rightly. Karin Michaelis named as the "dangerous age" the middle term of life at which a woman ordinarily ceases to exert a physical fascination upon men. She must then resign herself to be no longer sued and pursued, courted and caressed, and she can no longer hope to occupy a disproportionate share of one man's time, or of that of many, if she be plurally disposed. All is finished for her: she can neither give the disease nor impart the remedy; and she is effaced as a source of the most insidious

[344]

THE AGE OF SAFETY

and universal trouble that the world has ever known.

Is it not sad, Mesdames?—and who could blame you for being vexed with this odious little Scandinavian and her hatefully candid book? . . .

But looking now to the advantage of my own sex, I see not why the Dangerous Age for women should not be the Age of Safety for men, and I wish it might occur as early for the one as for the other.

WHAT THINKING man but has rejoiced at the end of that long slavery, so often ignoble in its basis, to which he has sacrificed his golden years? Oh, the blind worship of dolls, red-lipped and long-haired and bauble-eyed, by which a man gets no profit of his youth and often goes maimed all his days! Oh, the cursed tyranny of the flesh, to which strength yields up its best sinews, genius its highest aspirations, ambition its loftiest dreams! What tragedies are to be laid to it!—secret tragedies from which the world bleeds, though it dare not publish them. What worse tragedy than that of the hatred and alienation which too often mark the end of this bondage

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

of the flesh for both man and woman! When, oh when will the world learn to use this thing as a blessing instead of a plague and a curse? . . .

Not very soon, it is to be feared; but the sooner, we may hope, when men and women alike, instead of lamenting the end of sexual domination or seeking to prolong it, shall rather rejoice at regaining their freedom. It is a degrading yoke, as we know, which presses many almost from the cradle to the grave. Some of the ancient poets not inaptly saw in it the malice of the gods, and Sophocles gave public thanks when he was at length freed from the stings of desire (that he was then about eighty does not damage the present moral). In our civilization it prevents the full development of the race—perhaps we can not conceive what men and women would look like, or what their intellectual possibilities would be, without the handicap imposed upon them by countless ages of sexual slavery. So deeply rooted is it, both in the strength and the weakness of humanity, so confirmed by the sanction of religion and the prescription of immemorial habit, that a real reform can be hoped for only among the ultimate emancipations of the race. . . .

FIFTEEN

REST

THIS LITTLE word is one of the sweetest and most consoling of our common speech.

Merely to utter it gives one pause, for many are its pious and healing implications. If nothing more, it conveys the image of a great hush and the fall of cooling, noiseless waters on ears closed to the sensuous challenge of life.

It expresses an idea which is cherished in the innermost heart of humanity, as if in obedience to some Divine instinct. Also it signifies one of the great illusions that make the hardest life not merely endurable but spiced with a single element of romance.

But nothing can be said on this subject which is not trite, the theme being one of the eternal staples of human gossip and speculation. As, without the hope of rest *some day*, who would have strength or will to go on with his burden? Or,

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

it is the one light that never quite fails us in our journey to the grave. Perhaps of all the sayings of JESUS, the most touching, the one that has found deepest echo in the heart of humanity, is this: "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

The promise of rest is one that every man makes himself, from the poorest to the richest. Nay, the need of it levels all distinctions of fortune, for the rich man has a proverbial difficulty of attaining it. Lazarus plans to take things easy in the eleemosynary line when his children are grown up. Dives will really settle down to enjoy life when he has lifted that last million.

Both cheat themselves, have always cheated themselves, and yet the Great Illusion endures. It outlasts love itself, for the fondest lovers are glad at length to turn away from each other—to rest!

*Where the bridegroom all night through
Shall not turn him to the bride.*

Yes, dearie, I know it is written that we shall rest from our labours—but not on this side of the
[348]

REST

heavenly Jordan. For I have come to fifty years in this pilgrimage of life, and I do not yet see the beginning of my rest. The beginning?—alas, when has this old heart of mine borne more anxious labour than at present? Often it will not let me sleep o' nights for its complaining—ah, what things the heart tells us at such times, when it seems to have intuition of its destiny! And sometimes, from a depth almost below consciousness, it whispers of a boon it desires very much and yet fears to name. Rest? . . . Aye, rest indeed!

BUT SHORT of that dreaded consummation, do we—nay, can we—ever really rest? We are sure the heart never stops beating, and there be learned men who affirm that the brain is always in a state of activity, conscious or unconscious. I am apt to agree with this, as I have scarcely slept without dreams since boyhood. Is it any wonder that we go wrong with our poor brains so overworked—never suffered to run down even once in fifty years! . . .

There is thus involved a double idea which makes the thought of final rest (as dissociated from the fear of death) so precious and consoling to us. It

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

is that we shall escape not alone the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," but also that we shall be freed from the fardels of our own physical, individual life. Rest and immunity from both are to be had only upon one condition—a condition which does not always seem so hard, dearie, after you have come to fifty year!

Not that you need love life the less at that epoch—indeed you are apt to love it the more and to yearn for it as one must for all lovely and perishable things. But while your sense of the preciousness of life is increased, so likewise is your perception of its illusions. In youth, in order to gain the keenest edge for our joys, we make it a point of honour to ignore certain things that enter into the account. This might be called the truce of youth. Age is bound by no such exigent comity: it knows that the rose is sweet, and it has an ironic sense of what is behind the sweetness of the rose. This is not an advantage, in especial, except as it tends to facilitate the final abdication and bring you to your portion of rest.

But still we revolt against *that*, save at the very last moment, and cling to the hope that we shall have the repose we crave on less ineluctable terms.

REST

We want to rest, oh so much, but also we want to live and enjoy it—to *know* that we are resting. And while we voice our vain plea the heart and the brain keep up their unintermittent labour and anguish. How hard it is to make these children understand!

THERE IS an old Latin phrase which casts some light on the problem—*Parva domus, magna quies*: Small is the house, but great the peace thereof!

The world is too much with us, even in age, that we should have here the perfect rest we seek. How shall you bribe the poor heart that wakes in sad loneliness at night to weep over its lost youth or to tremble before the exaggerated cares of the morrow?

Ah! there is but one way, the oldest of human fashions, which we are too apt to associate with images of horror and repulsion. And though we cry for rest—rest—rest all the term of our lives, and insist that life has been to us a martyrdom, yet do we shrink from the true Rest when at last it comes to our relief. See! it is but a single step to the narrow house and the great peace, the per-

REALITIES AND INVENTIONS

fect rest: but no! we cry out in terror and turn back to the life that has scourged us so cruelly. Anything but *that!* we exclaim, while the long awaited and entreated One stands patient by. . . .

How hard it is, dearie, to make these children understand! . . .

Give us our rest, O Father, in thine own appointed time and of thy gracious olden fashion. Lay thy annulling seal upon the o'erlaboured heart: drop thy healing nepenthe into the weary brain. Teach us not to fear that which brings us nearer to Thee. Suffer us to go to sleep with no more consciousness than the flowers that take no care for their awakening. Give us this last and best of all thy gifts—*Parva domus, magna quies!*

LAGNIAPPE

LAGNIAPPE

ONE

PHILOSOPHY IN LITTLE

The Literary Motive

IF YOU ask me what is the first word of art,
I answer: Patience. And the second: again
Patience. And the third, once more: Patience!

II

To write at all it is necessary to do both good
and bad work—the proportion is what matters.

III

A vast amount of nonsense is put forth by
literary persons in the name of posterity. There
is dishonesty as well as nonsense in this. The
truth is, every earnest writer works in and for
the present, with little thought of posterity. With-

LAGNIAPPE

out the stimulus furnished by a living audience, it is very doubtful if any literature worth while would be produced.

IV

Robert Louis says wisely that it is not *how much* we earn for our day's wage, but *how we earn it*, that really matters.

A crust and freedom would suit me better than any sort of servitude or capitulation, though gilded with the income of a Carnegie. But the world is so organized that one can at best but clutch the shadow of independence. Well, even for the shadow I would risk much. . . . Nay, I would be the veriest beggar in thy courts, oh Liberty!

V

In the time of Pericles there were no newspapers, yet even the fish-wives discussed the great orators and poets in excellent Attic. In these piping days of journalism everybody is taking on the newspaper mind and our popular dialect is become a sort of disease borrowed from the lazaret-house of languages.

PHILOSOPHY IN LITTLE

VI

Nothing is so difficult as to think, so to speak, in a straight line, for the mind's strongest tendency is to turn round on itself like a mouse in a cage. The faculty of straight-out thinking is one of the rarest, and no man who possesses it can escape the divining rod of Fame. Sometimes it makes a great philosopher like Kant, or a world-master like Napoleon, or a grand creative artist like Balzac.

VII

Byron said that Curran talked more and better poetry than he had ever read. Allowing for the hyperbole, one sees why Curran never wrote anything equal to such praise. Talking and writing are two different things and presuppose two very different kinds of talent.

VIII

No task were possible did we not see the end of it from the beginning, and perhaps, with all our love of life, we should shrink from it with a thousand-fold terror were there no certainty of death. Swift's conception of a tribe of human beings who

LAGNIAPPE

could not die, is justly voted the most horrible in literature.

IX

Every reflective genius needs the second and the third thought, and hence this type is rarely great or successful in action. "I think like a man and act like a child," said Renan.

X

I have got through caring much about style—what I care for is a man or a woman who has LIVED. Mere style is the affectation and worship of pedagogues or pinheads.

XI

To hold the Ideal to-day is no assurance that you will gain it to-morrow:—even the humblest writer is plagued with pages of past work which his heart misgives him he will never again equal.

XII

"I have taken too many crops out of the brain," said Thackeray, predicting his early death. It is the *kind* of crop, however, that tells. Bad writers generally live long.

PHILOSOPHY IN LITTLE

XIII

Lafcadio Hearn would have given his books to the publishers for the privilege of correcting his proofs. This is the spirit that makes literature but keeps you out of the "best sellers."

XIV

It is a thrilling thought that I shall live while my thought survives and fructifies in other minds. Fail me not, thou inner light!

XV

If thou wouldst have good of thy genius, flee the chatterers:—power is from the Silence.

XVI

Plague on the voluminous! I had rather write a half-dozen perfect pages than the "hundred novels of old man Dumas."

XVII

Constant effort is the price of literary production:—the source of talent is a well that often seals up over-night.

LAGNIAPPE

XVIII

At one's best, one writes up to the level of *somebody's* faith and love and admiration:—there is no other way to the heights.

XIX

Perhaps the bitterest thought that can come to a man is that the work to which he has set his hand is not worth the doing at all. And it is a thought that has plagued the greatest.

XX

Balzac's old Goriot says:—"We bring our children into the world and they drive us out of it." This is one of the truths for telling which a writer is hated by the public.

XXI

Nothing is rarer than to find a writer possessing literature and life in equal degree. Of the two it is better, for success, to be short on literature and long on life.

XXII

The day is long for power and purpose; short for weakness and irresolution.

PHILOSOPHY IN LITTLE

XXIII

The first step in learning how to write is to learn how to feel.

XXIV

When head and heart ripen together, rich is the harvest.

XXV

Fail not to make a daily offering to the great god Futility!

Truths and Truisms

BARRING ACCIDENTS, most people live as long as they want to: the Life Force depends upon the will even more than is now recognized. But you shall not keep the precious boon of life by fleeing all effort, caring merely to live and lying close like a hare in its form:—lie you never so close the thrifty Reaper will not pass you by. Therefore, look to it—to live is to WILL and to will is TO DO.

II

What is it in human nature that makes men love to grovel before fetiches of flesh or stone?

LAGNIAPPE

Nothing is more certain than that millions prefer such prostration to the noblest dignity and freedom. To kowtow to any fool drest in a little brief authority,—this is one of the strongest and most deeply rooted of human instincts: it is also the chief obstacle to human progress. No doubt it harks back to those early ages of the world, and some not so remote, when fear and superstition were the supreme governing forces. And though the substance of these be long since gone, the shadow still affrights us.

III

Candour is inculcated in all the copy-books, but a man who attempts to make his way in the world without cunning, both aggressive and defensive, soon finds himself as a lamb among wolves. It's a pity that our stock moralities are drawn up without reference to the facts of life.

IV

No hypocrisy is more common among men than a pretence of friendship and regard. And yet, hollow as it is, nothing avails more to keep the frame of things together.

PHILOSOPHY IN LITTLE

V

We need the friend that is near much less than the friend that is remote. Perhaps the most precious and helpful sympathy acts only from afar.

VI

Complain not that thou art ever longing and unsatisfied—to be content and without desire is the portion of Age or Death.

VII

There is so much treachery in the run of men that Jesus Christ ought to be accepted as Divine from this fact alone—that He managed to pick twelve with but one traitor among them!

VIII

In former years I was somewhat romantically inclined, but now I find myself apt to agree with Bacon, that there is very little friendship among men. Still, I continue to dream of a friend!

IX

The tongue is an obscene member, as certain votaries of Venus well know; one does not readily

LAGNIAPPE

show it, even to the doctor. Have a care of thy tongue—it may be the primeval Snake!

X

There is consolation behind every catastrophe. Nothing better attests the wisdom of the Greeks than the eternal fable of Pandora.

XI

Disraeli's famous saying that no sensible man ever tells his religion, is in some danger of being discredited with Dr. Eliot and so many others rushing into print. But are they really telling?

XII

Many a soul dies in terror to awake and find God smiling upon it.

XIII

To be free is to be alone. The herd may admire and envy your state, but all the same they give you the road and go by on the other side.

XIV

There is enough good in life to make us wish to live forever and enough evil to reconcile us to any death.

PHILOSOPHY IN LITTLE

XV

Seen from Sirius, doubtless our troubles are not of so much consequence.

XVI

That men do not live too long is perhaps the one thing for which they have sound reason to be grateful.

XVII

To praise a man's talent and a woman's beauty, though you do not believe in either, is the most profitable of perjuries.

XVIII

Let us not hate life because we have to relinquish it, but let us fold our tent with serenity and pass out with a Hail! to the advancing generations.

XIX

I have known many men, and many more have heard my name, but the friends of my heart—ah, how easy it is to number them!

LAGNIAPPE

XX

Age enables us to see life stripped of illusions, even as autumn shows us the wood in its bare anatomy.

XXI

There isn't a single laugh in the Bible from beginning to end. This is no laughing matter.

The Woman

“**S**HE IS a fool, Barry,” says Sir Charles Lyndon, referring to his amiable consort, “but she will kill you as she has killed me.” Nothing in that masterpiece of “Barry Lyndon” better certifies the greatness of Thackeray. And they call him satirist because he would not blink the facts of life!

II

In the time of Montaigne a man was considered old at forty; nowadays there is a well-marked period of second youth, fruitful in romance, which sets in about forty-five and may run to sixty—it all depends on the woman.

PHILOSOPHY IN LITTLE

III

I love women—oh yes, I confess it!—but I must say that I have never seen the Principle of Evil incarnate in a man in such a degree as now and then it appears in a woman.

IV

Tell a woman one thing about herself which she does not like to hear, and you stand bare in her regard, with no shred of grace from all your previous loyalty and lip service.

V

The Garden of Eden story is now generally discredited, but a long time yet will be required to clear up the character of the Snake and the Woman.

VI

Fortune is personified as a woman, not merely for that it is fickle, but because, in a deep sense, woman is the bringer of most good or evil fortune.

VII

When age forbids a woman to attract with her sex she sometimes falls back on the ordinary hu-

LAGNIAPPE

man virtues. This is a compensation not to be despised.

VIII

There has never been discovered an acceptable substitute for youth—but women continue to rummage the vanity shops.

IX

To have love is to have power:—Love is the mighty parent and begetter.

X

The true test of love comes when both man and woman have reached a “certain” age.

XI

Never look to be forgiven by the man who has wronged you. The woman, however, sometimes relents.

XII

There has never been a kingdom of this or any other world that a man would not throw away for the woman of his heart.

PHILOSOPHY IN LITTLE

XIII

It is a law of Nature that sex should preoccupy the best years of life—an unjust law most of us feel, sooner or later.

XIV

Is this the climacteric—when a man stops seeing the faces of women in his dreams?

XV

To hate where one has loved is an exquisite indulgence which some people mistake for a virtue.

XVI

The illusion of sex countenances all the other illusions.

TWO

THE GRAIN OF WHEAT

IT IS curious how the vital word—the electric spark of true feeling or passion—survives in literature, though it have to be recovered even as a single grain of wheat from many bushels of chaff. I felt this strongly t’other day in looking through Hazlitt’s lectures on the Elizabethan dramatists. Rather a dull book in the main, I fear, though Hazlitt is one of my cherished familiars; dull not so much by fault of the lecturer as by the intolerable length, and too often most unpoetic quality of many of the “specimens” presented. And decidedly hard reading. It seems wonderful that Hazlitt found an audience to sit them out, and I suspect they confirmed his friend Lamb in those humourous prejudices of his against lecturing, which find expression in one of his quaint letters.

Hazlitt’s own sound talk, without close reference
[370]

THE GRAIN OF WHEAT

to his subject, is much the better part of these lectures, though I go not so far as to say they were not worth doing. Indeed, I would utter no such censure upon any work of honest Hazlitt's. Only I wish there were more of him to the "intolerable deal" of Elizabethan.

But to my point. How the vital word leaps out from those musty old forgotten plays which, generally without true inspiration or artistic "staying power," and written in a manner almost obsolete, scarce the talent of Hazlitt could serve to make interesting. Profiting by his pioneer labours in this field, I offer a few instances.

Old Decker's monument is in one line—a characterization of Christ:

"The first true gentleman that ever breathed."

John Lyly's little Campaspe song of a dozen lines, which tells how Cupid lost his eyes to the beauty, has long survived his plays.

Of Marlowe, that mighty young rival of Shakespeare, we have strictly speaking only one line—

Was this the face that launched a thousand ships?

LAGNIAPPE

The couplet,

*Cut is the branch that might have grown full
straight,
And burned is Apollo's laurel bough,*

though memorable from its application to the poet himself, is seldom quoted even by scholars.

Beaumont and Fletcher have—

*'tis not a life,
'Tis but a piece of childhood thrown away,*

in admiring the simple pathos of which we may well echo the praise of Hazlitt.

Beaumont alone has the world-famous and memorable—

*What things have we seen
Done at the Mermaid!*

Also:

So nimble and so full of subtile flame.

And (less often quoted)—

Nothing so dainty sweet as lovely melancholy.

THE GRAIN OF WHEAT

Ben Jonson, who thought himself a peg or two above Shakespeare, and who certainly wrote a ton of learned rubbish, has—

Drink to me only with thine eyes,

for which a world of lovers should forgive him much; as also—

Oh so white! Oh so soft! Oh so sweet is she!

And the noble apostrophe—

Dear son of memory and great heir of fame.

With a few other familiar references to Shakespeare. And that exquisiteness in little—

“the bag o’ the bee.”

Here’s shrinkage, of a truth; but ’tis the fan with which winnowing Time has sifted the Elizabethans, some of whom plumed themselves, the public concurring, on their successful rivalry of Shakespeare. In truth, the great William seems not to have been inclined to contradict them, for

LAGNIAPPE

does he not modestly speak of his “desiring this man’s art and that man’s scope,” etc.? It seems to me not the least wonderful circumstance of the glorious legend of Shakespeare. . . .

I trust the valiant reader who has come so far with me may reckon not vainly that he has gleaned a few grains of wheat by the way, now that we have reached

THE END.





